



The
Thousand
Eugenias

By

MRS. ALFRED SIDGWICK



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THE THOUSAND EUGENIAS



THE
THOUSAND EUGENIAS

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

MRS. ALFRED SIDGWICK

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'CYNTHIA'S WAY,' 'THE GRASSHOPPERS,'
'THE INNER SHRINE,' ETC.

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THE THOUSAND EUGENIAS

I

THE schoolroom was deserted because an uncle, who had come to Bayswater Square on a few days' visit, had taken the children to the Zoological Gardens for the afternoon. He had not invited Miss Ferrers, their governess, to join the party; and after she had tidied the schoolroom and had done various out-of-door commissions for the mistress of the house, she returned to her kingdom on the fourth floor and sat down to rest. Next day she was going to the seaside with the family, and she still had to pack for herself and the children; but she was too tired to begin directly. The hot weather had come with a rush, and she had been on her feet for hours. Mrs. Hunter and her grown-up daughters had agreed at lunch-time that they were not inclined to move, so Amabel Ferrers had been obliged to move for them from shop to shop and back to the house again, until her little body was weary of this great world.

It was not agreeable to live in Mrs. Hunter's house as governess, and Amabel would have left long ago

if she had known how to get food and shelter elsewhere. But a governess is not a cook with the market at her command, and Amabel knew that if she threw up this engagement she might be reduced to any straits before she found another. Her story, so far, was the commonest story in the world. Her parents had brought her up in idleness and, if they ever gave a thought to the future at all, had taken for granted that she would marry in their lifetime. Unfortunately, they both died before she was eighteen; the mother died after the father, and left just enough to pay for her funeral. Amabel was an only child, and knew of no relations except an uncle who had gone to Mexico, twenty years ago, to seek his fortune. As he never wrote home she did not know whether he was dead or alive, but she had found an old address amongst her father's papers, and had written there at a venture some months ago. So far no answer had come, and she had made up her mind that her uncle Michael was dead or out of reach and that she was alone in the world.

This afternoon, as she stared at the sky and the chimney-pots, her thoughts were vexatious and distressing. For several days past Mrs. Hunter's manner had been more unpleasant than usual, and it would be impossible to say anything stronger than that of any one's manner. Amabel knew why she was in disgrace. A fortnight ago there had been a children's party in the house, and she had assisted at it, and

Mr. Sheringham himself had showed her marked attention. No one else would have mattered quite so much. But Mr. Sheringham! the great financier! who was invited a dozen times before he came once! who was to marry Georgina Hunter, if only he could be made to see it! who was so eligible that Georgina hardly expected to pull it off, but wished she might, because Mr. Sheringham was *so* good-looking; while Mr. Mendoza, the other string to her bow, was fat and had little pig's eyes! That children's party had been a fiasco from Georgina's point of view, and there was worse to follow. On Sunday last, Mr. Sheringham had met Miss Ferrers at morning service, and had walked home with her and the children; and the day before yesterday he had actually found her in Kensington Gardens in the late afternoon, and had stayed talking to her for nearly half-an-hour. On both occasions the children had carried the news home, and Mrs. Hunter had told Amabel that her conduct was forward and unladylike, and that if the offence was repeated she must take the consequences.

This very afternoon the offence had been repeated. She had happened to be in the drawing-room taking instructions about some errands, and Mr. Sheringham had called, and he had looked at her in the most friendly way and asked her if she was going to Eastbourne with the family. When she admitted that she was, he said he thought of running down there himself for a few days; and when she hurried out of the room

he got up and opened the door for her. She wished he would leave her alone. She was a moth and he was a star, and she was a sensible moth with no desire to singe her wings. She would not let her thoughts dwell on him; but her thoughts dwelt with foreboding on Miss Georgina Hunter's manner when she met her on the stairs just now.

The irruption into the room of a red-headed page boy, with a message from Mrs. Hunter, made her jump.

"Mrs. 'Unte wants you downstairs," he said.

"I've been out ever since lunch and I haven't had tea yet," said Amabel, trying to seem calm and indifferent. "Do you think Mrs. Hunter wants me at once, George?"

"She looked as if she did," said the boy.

"I wonder why tea is so late?"

"I 'eard Mrs. 'Unte tell Mary she needn't bring any up 'ere as the young ladies and gentlemen would 'ave theirs out. Shall I sneak you up a cup from the kitchen, Miss?"

"Yes — no — I can't wait," said Amabel, and she ran downstairs.

Mrs. Hunter sat in her drawing-room surrounded by lamps and silver photograph frames and frilled silk cushions. She was a stupid-looking woman, with a consequential, pursed-up mouth and hard, colourless eyes. She turned towards Amabel with an air of dislike and did not ask her to sit down.

"I am not satisfied with you, Miss Ferrers," she began. "I have sent for you to tell you so."

"I am doing my best for the children," began Amabel.

"I am not thinking of the children," said Mrs. Hunter.

Amabel wished she had the courage to sit down, she wished she had stayed herself with tea, she wished she had been born without a temper; and she looked at the lady and wondered why people in fortune's good graces should be so unkind to people out of fortune's favor.

"Your behavior is most unbecoming," continued Mrs. Hunter.

"In what way?" said Amabel.

"I am not going to enter into details," said Mrs. Hunter. "The fact is, you allow your head to be turned. You seem to think that when you come downstairs and the gentlemen who visit at the house are civil to you, that you are on an equality with them. I feel it my duty to open your eyes. None of them would ever think of you seriously."

Amabel did not speak, but she could not force back the flush of indignant color in her cheeks or the anger that set her mouth and flashed in her eyes.

"That is the worst of people who have come down in the world," said Mrs. Hunter. "They never want to realize that they have come down."

"Oh, but they do," said Amabel. "The fact is everlastingly forced on them."

"Then you don't show it in your behavior. Just now when Mr. Sheringham was here ——"

"I should be glad if I need never see Mr. Sheringham again," cried Amabel. "I don't care about him."

According to her lights at the moment she spoke the truth. She felt angry with Mr. Sheringham for having made matters worse for her than they need have been; she felt angry with his coolness and his determination and with her own helplessness.

"What unladylike expressions you use, Miss Ferrers," said Mrs. Hunter. "It is not necessary that you should care about Mr. Sheringham or any one else you have the privilege of meeting in my house. Mr. Sheringham is a most charming person and an intimate friend, and it must be painful for him to come here and meet a young woman who throws herself at his head."

"I should think his head is fairly strong," said Amabel.

"At any rate I am going to do my duty and stop it," said Mrs. Hunter, who was working herself into a pretty passion. "Unless you can give me a guarantee of better behavior for the future ——"

"How can I give you a guarantee that the man won't follow me to church or find out when I'm in the Square with the children?" said Amabel, her anger inexpediently expressing itself.

"To whom are you alluding, Miss Ferrers?"

"To Mr. Sheringham, of course."

"Then be good enough to give him his proper title. I am not accustomed to hear one of my friends spoken of as a 'man.' However, your impertinence only confirms me in my intentions. I shall not take you to Eastbourne with us, and as we leave the house to-morrow you must leave to-morrow too. I may as well pay you your wages and then we need not meet again. It will be pleasanter for both sides."

"Of course, you know that you are treating me abominably," said Amabel. "If I were a kitchen-maid ——"

"Kitchenmaids have a market value," said Mrs. Hunter. "Incompetent young ladies have none."

"I have nowhere to go to from here."

"That is not my business."

"I have done nothing to deserve such treatment."

"I refuse to prolong the discussion," said Mrs. Hunter, holding out a five-pound note. "I owe you for one month and I will pay you for two. It is more than you deserve."

"It is my legal due," said Amabel; "and I believe you ought to pay me board wages too."

"I shall not pay you another penny," said Mrs. Hunter, and the note fluttered from her fingers and fell on the floor. "Remember you are leaving more or less under a cloud."

"That is a disgraceful thing to say," exclaimed Amabel.

"I shall say it to any one who comes here for your character," said Mrs. Hunter. "I consider you flighty and impertinent."

Amabel felt that she had no weapons and no hope of redress. She could not rail back as a woman of coarser grain would have done. She picked up the bank note and ran hastily out of the room, and then she burst into tears. She was still crying when the red-headed page boy came into the school-room with a cup of tea and a plate of bread and butter on a tray. He looked at the girl and went away again. In a few minutes Amabel heard a slow, heavy step on the stairs, and she dried her eyes and tried to pull herself together, because she thought it must be Mrs. Hunter. But the door opened and the cook appeared, panting and good-natured.

"Ginger said you were crying, Miss," she began; "I thought I'd come and see. Ain't you well?"

"I'm to leave the house to-morrow, Mrs. Pugsley," said Amabel. "Do you know of any cheap, respectable room? I've nowhere to go."

The cook sat down.

"Why are you to leave the house to-morrow?" she inquired, and Amabel saw that every one would ask her the same question, and that it would be difficult to answer.

"Mrs. Hunter is not satisfied," she said; "I think she has taken a dislike to me."

"Mrs. 'Unter is not a lady," said the cook, with the queer discrimination of her class in such matters. "You are. That's reason enough, I'll be bound. Don't you fret, Miss. I'll go round to the office I patronise to-morrow and I'll tell 'em if they don't find you something soft within a week they won't 'ave me on their books again, nor any of my friends."

"It's very kind of you," said Amabel, cheering up a little, "but I'm afraid no one will take me without a reference."

"Well!" said the cook, beginning to bristle.

"Mrs. Hunter refuses me a good one."

"Then I shall have a few words with Mrs. 'Unter to-morrow morning," said the cook majestically. "She won't let me go if she can 'elp it. A better behaved young lady I never saw — and them children so spoiled and quarrelsome, Job 'imself would give 'em a good hiding, and of course it's what they deserve."

At that moment George's red head thrust itself cautiously in at the door.

"Now what do you want, Ginger?" said the cook. "Don't you see I'm engaged?"

The boy held a telegram towards her and she took it from him.

"You needn't wait," she said; and, when he had shut the door, she turned to Amabel.

"Ginger is that curious. It's for you, Miss," she said.

II

"FOR me!" cried Amabel. She could hardly believe it; but she saw her name on the orange-colored envelope and on the form inside.

"Come and see me, Paris. Cannot leave. Hôtel Ritz. — MICHAEL FERRERS."

"How extraordinary," said Amabel, and she showed the form to her friend.

"What's it mean?" said the cook. "I never can make head nor tail of a telegram. Why can't people write a plain letter? If there was less hurry there'd be less mistakes, I always tell my kitchenmaids. But you may preach all your life and you won't persuade other folks to practise."

"I suppose," said Amabel, and she took the telegram into her hands again — "I suppose it is from my uncle, Michael Ferrers. I wrote to him some months ago. I thought he was in South America, but this seems to come from Paris."

"How do you know?" said the cook suspiciously, and they examined the telegram together. When Amabel lifted her head she pointed to the five-pound note lying on the table.

"That is all the money I have in the world," said she.

"Lor!" said the cook.

"And if I spend it on going to Paris ——"

"And find it was one of them lying telegrams, and you hadn't no uncle at all, and there was no such hotel."

"I don't see how that could happen," said Amabel.

"Anything can happen with telegrams," said the cook, "else what'd the halfpenny papers do? 'Horrible massacre!' one day: 'Women and children tortured: nobody left alive!' and next day every one all right and the news as flat as pancakes. I know them telegrams. And yet, seeing how you're placed, it do seem worth a little risk — just to go there and drive up to the hotel — if you can find it — and ask if they know your uncle — and come straight back if they don't."

Here the cook raised her voice. "Ginger," she cried, and when Ginger immediately opened the door, she winked at Amabel.

"I knew you wouldn't be far off," she said placidly; "you run round to Whiteley's as fast as your feet'll carry you, and go to that counter where they have the railway time-tables laid out — somewhere near the provisions, it is — say you want to get to Paris quick and cheap. You won't have to pay — but there's twopence in case you do — and mind you're back in five minutes."

“And what’ll I say if SHE rings?” said the boy, in injured accents.

“Say I sent you for a lemon,” said the cook. “Here’s another penny. Bring one.”

“If I go — and spend my money — and nothing comes of it — I shall be worse off than before,” said Amabel, when the boy had run off.

“You mustn’t look forward to that,” said the cook. “Turn a bright face to the world and the world’ll turn a bright face to you. Besides, you can always come back here and lodge with my sister in the Artesian Road, as is a widow. Don’t you trouble too much. It’s no good, and it spoils the complexion.”

“I wish I could cook,” said Amabel. “I should never be out of work then.”

“P’raps you’d sometimes wish you were — when the hot weather comes and the jellies are uncertain. Every perfession has its drawbacks,” said the cook; and then Amabel went on with her tea, and presently Ginger came back with various time-tables.

“If I go by Newhaven and Dieppe to-morrow, I shall get there at seven,” said Amabel, in a little while. “Oh, Cookie, dear, am I really going to risk half my fortune! The single fare is £1, 5s.; the return is ——”

“Don’t take a return,” advised the cook. “It looks distrustful. I must go and see to my dinner now, my dear, because last time I let Maria do the quenelles she sent ’em up in a mash. But I’ll see you off from Victoria to-morrow morning.”

"I can't believe I'm going," said Amabel. "I can't believe in that telegram."

"It's a chance," said the cook, "and if you don't take a chance in this world, where are you? I dare-say it won't be all jam in Paris any more nor what it is here. Your uncle may have a wife, and she may have a temper; but if he's one to like a pretty face and figure you'll do. You're not as unlucky as you think you are, and that's a fact. You can't expect everything of them above, and as far as eyes and hair and shape go, they've done pretty well for you."

Amabel looked in the glass when her friend had departed, and she certainly saw a charming girl reflected there. Her hair was thick and bright and wavy, and her eyes were grey and her nose straightly cut and delicate; and besides beauty of feature she possessed just now the beauty of youth, and would always possess the beauty of expression that is the outward sign of kindness and intelligence. The sudden change in her prospects had dried her tears and diverted her thoughts, and as she packed for the children and herself, she dwelt on the uncertain issues of to-morrow instead of fretting over the offences of to-day. She tried to remember everything her father had ever said of his brother Michael, and she could not remember much. She did not know of any estrangement to account for her uncle's long silence. Her parents had believed him to be dead, and when she found his name above an address in a Spanish-

sounding South American town, she had written as people write to some one quite unknown, in a spirit of adventure and with uncertain hope of a reply.

The evening passed quickly. The children came back and kept her busy, and when they were in bed she still had a good deal to do. It was midnight before she had finished, and then she fell asleep, and woke with a start next morning when a maid came in with a cup of tea sent upstairs by the cook. Amabel drank it as she was dressing.

"Why are you putting on your hat?" said Florrie, the elder of two children who slept in the room.

"Because I am going away," said Amabel.

"I know you are going away. Mamma told me last night she would not keep you any longer because you were not setting Guinevere and me a good example. But she said you were to give us our breakfast first as usual."

"I'm afraid I can't stay for that," said Amabel, putting on her veil.

"But you must if Mamma tells you to," said the child, with a good imitation of her mother's pompous manner; and as Amabel took no notice she jumped out of bed and ran downstairs to lodge a complaint.

Luckily for Amabel her trunk had been carried down by Ginger and a housemaid the night before, but she was stopped herself this morning by the apparition of Mrs. Hunter in a quilted dressing-gown and curling-pins.

.....

"Miss Ferrers," she said, "be good enough to go upstairs again at once and give the children their breakfast. You will leave this house when we leave for Eastbourne and not a moment before."

"I must leave at once," said Amabel, and she took another step towards the last flight of stairs; but Mrs. Hunter's portly figure barred the way.

"Come along, Miss," said a fat, good-tempered voice from below, "the cab's here."

"Cook!" said Mrs. Hunter, and she went downstairs herself, followed, of course, by Amabel. Ginger was in the hall as well as the cook.

"It's all right, mum," said the cook. "I'll be back before you're ready to give orders. I'm only going as far as Victoria to see Miss Ferrers off."

"Victoria! Didn't you tell me yesterday you had nowhere to go, you wicked, deceitful girl!—trying to excite my pity on false pretences."

"There wasn't much false pretences," said the cook, for Amabel would not condescend to speak. "Things is like weather, and take up sudden for the better sometimes. Miss Ferrers had an invitation she didn't expect last night to go and stay with an uncle in Paris at the Hôtel— What was the name of the hotel, Miss?"

"The Hôtel Ritz," said Amabel.

"A likely story," said Mrs. Hunter. "Dukes and millionaires stay at the Hôtel Ritz."

"I shouldn't mind either the one or the other in

my family," said the cook, and she followed Amabel down the front steps.

"I'm sure you'll lose your place on my account," said Amabel regretfully, as they drove away.

"Lor' bless you, my dear, I can get twenty places a hour and pick and choose," said her champion. "Think of my made dishes and my gravies. I've rather a fancy to go and live with an earl. I read such a lot about earls in all them Family Story-tellers, but I ain't never rolled out pastry for one. I don't see why I shouldn't as good as another. After all, pastry is pastry and nothing else, whether it's for a earl or a gentleman."

"You're the only friend I'm leaving in London," said Amabel as the train moved out of the station.

"And I hope you'll soon be back with one better worth looking at," said the cook.

Amabel's fellow-pilgrims certainly seemed to think her worth looking at, and she travelled with some pleasant people, who helped her through the Douane and into a cab at Paris. As she drove through the twinkling streets to the Place Vendôme, all the hopes and doubts that had possessed her since yesterday reached their height, and when the driver stopped at the doors of the hotel and a porter came forward, Amabel hardly had breath enough to bring out her uncle's name. But the man only signed her inside the hotel, and there she had to do with a clerk, who spoke English — said that Mr. Ferrers was in, and

invited her to wait in a room close by. She sat down and looked through the window at the courtyard, which was gay with plants and full of people sitting at little tables. Through the open door of the room she saw other people pass through the hall, in and out of the hotel, and from the square outside she heard the rumble of wheels, the tuff-tuff of automobiles, and the cries of paper boys with the latest edition of *La Patrie*. But her impressions were blurred, for her thoughts were fixed entirely on the unknown uncle, and every pulse in her body seemed to wait for his arrival. But the noise and the movement went on around her, and no one came into the room. She stared out at the courtyard, she watched the hall, the minutes passed very slowly. At last she went up to the centre table, found some English papers there, and turned over the pages of the *Times*. When she looked towards the door again, a man of middle age had come inside the room, and stood there watching her. He shut the door as she went towards him.

III

"I AM Amabel Ferrers," she said.

"I am Michael Ferrers," said he, and then for a moment they took stock of each other. He was a grizzled, wiry-looking man, and he seemed to be in a hurry; and his eyes, though they were fixed on her, were preoccupied.

"You're very much like your father," he said; "when he was a boy he was so pretty that strangers used to stop him in the street and ask him his name. Every one took to him at once."

"Some people take a dislike to me," said Amabel, thinking of Mrs. Hunter and her family.

"I don't think I shall," said Mr. Ferrers; "I'm glad you've come. I shall have ten days or so here, unless anything goes wrong with the Eugenia, and then back I go to Mexico."

Amabel felt dreadfully disappointed. If her uncle was going to the other end of the world in a short ten days, nothing much would come of her acquaintance with him. She wondered who Eugenia was, and why Mr. Ferrers spoke of her with the definite article.

"Your letter crawled around the world after me," he continued. "I got it in Japan. I was very sorry

to hear my brother and his wife were both dead. I always meant to look them up, but I haven't been as near England as this for twenty years, and I never write letters. You didn't tell me much in yours. Are you an only child?"

"Yes," said Amabel; "I've neither kith nor kin — except you."

"What have you been doing, then, since your parents died?"

"I was in a situation as governess till this morning."

"Bless me! didn't my brother make money?"

"Never very much, and when mother died there wasn't five pounds. I didn't tell you in my letter, because I thought you might be as poor as I was. If you are going back to Mexico, Uncle Michael, I'm afraid I ought to go straight back to London and find a new situation. The money I have won't last many days, and I don't know any one in London to help me except a cook ——"

"A cook!"

"Yes — where I was governess — she was very kind, but, of course, she is not well off and ——"

"But I am," interrupted Mr. Ferrers. "I wish I'd known about your father. It puzzles me why any one who wants money shouldn't get it. If the Eugenia behaves as I expect she will, I shall have more money than *I* want soon."

"Is she — are you — is the Eugenia my aunt?" said Amabel.

"The Eugenia is a mine," said Mr. Ferrers seriously. "I am not married."

"I wish you were," said Amabel.

"You must find a wife for me, then," said Mr. Ferrers; "I've never had time. But you needn't think about going back to London yet. I'll order you a room and something to eat, and when you're ready come down here again and let me know. I've two people dining with me, and I must go back to them."

"Are they very smart people?" said Amabel a little later, when she had dressed and dined and found her uncle again. "I don't suppose you know what a smart woman would think of my clothes, and I've put on my Sunday frock."

"The Varasdins are Hungarians," said Mr. Ferrers, leading the way to the courtyard. "I only know them through doing business with the husband. She appears to be an agreeable woman. I never saw her till to-night. I think she's in black. They both speak English. They have suggested that we should go out somewhere—to a café, I suppose. It will be more entertaining for you than sitting still here."

Mr. Ferrers stopped near one of the little tables, and introduced Amabel to the two people waiting for him there. The husband was a tall, flabby-looking man, with shiftY brown eyes and a head of hair that wanted cutting. He made Amabel an elaborate bow, and at once engaged her in conversation, but she found it difficult to attend to him because her fascinated eyes

returned again and again to the brilliant figure of his wife. Even judged by the French standard of beauty, which differs so much from our own, Madame Varasdin was not a beautiful woman, and, judged by the English and the Greek ideals, she was positively plain. In colouring and in feature she could no more compare with Amabel than the monkey on a barrel organ can compare with the charming Italian boy who pets him. She had dark, very narrow eyes, a big mouth, a sallow skin, and stiff black hair rolled back from her face in Japanese fashion. But she had the manner and the glances of a woman who has found times without number that she is irresistible; she was as graceful as a cat, she talked with vivacity and she dressed with art. When Amabel appeared, she said a civil word or two, and then seemed to make up her mind that a girl in such a blouse and skirt was not one to reckon with. So she settled her long feather boa and entertained Mr. Ferrers and looked about her. In a little while her attention seemed to fix itself on a young man sitting at a table opposite their own, and when her party got up to go she went a little out of her way in order to pass close by him. There could be no doubt as to his nationality. He was well groomed, he was drinking a whisky and soda, he was reading *Punch* and the *Times*. As Madame Varasdin rustled past him, he looked up and at once sprang to his feet. His manner expressed ardent pleasure, but his British tongue said, "Oh, Madame Varasdin!"

and then stopped short. He seemed to know the husband too, and shook hands with him as if he only half liked the obligation.

Madame Varasdin mentioned to the others that he was Mr. Newby, and then she sat down at his table and talked to him, and Amabel thought she had never seen any one smile so brilliantly or express so much with her hands. But Mr. Ferrers soon grew impatient.

"We ought to be going," he said to M. Varasdin; and Varasdin said to his wife in a diffident voice —

"Mr. Ferrers thinks we should go now, Anastasie."

Anastasie's eyes almost shut as she just glanced at her husband.

"Go on," she said; "I will come when I am ready. Mr. Newby will escort me, I know."

"Rather," said Mr. Newby.

Varasdin was evidently used to doing as he was bid. He found a cab outside the hotel for his companions and himself and drove with them to the Café de Paris. On the way he told Mr. Ferrers that his wife had met Mr. Newby at Aix-les-Bains last year, and that he had a large income and was very sympathetic.

Amabel was amused by the little grunt with which her uncle received this account of their new acquaintance, but after that she did not listen to what the two men were saying, because they began to talk of business, and she was bewitched by the sights and lights

of Paris. When they were seated within the café, her uncle ordered ice for her and Bocks for M. Varasdin and himself, and they watched the midnight life of the city coming and going in fine raiment. They had been there for some time when Madame Varasdin appeared with Mr. Newby, and though the café was full of well-dressed women, all eyes followed her because she was strikingly tall and graceful and wore fine diamonds and a fine cloak. The cloak had hanging sleeves and an amazing ruffled collar and gold embroideries, and a Venetian painter would have shown you Anastasie framed and draped with it, and you would have turned like the rest of that company from Amabel, who was a beauty, to the woman who was plain.

She sat down and ordered little hot crayfish that she ate without bread or sauces and with the help of her fingers. She had lithe-looking, long hands, and they blazed with jewels, and Amabel first watched her and then turned away. The lady made her meal as her neighbours did, and yet it was unpleasant to see her delicate fingers tear the little creatures asunder. Amabel was a matter-of-fact Briton and not fanciful; yet it crossed her fancy that Madame Varasdin would have destroyed the crayfish with the same quickness and appetite if they had been alive. When she had finished, she pushed back her chair and talked to Mr. Ferrers and Mr. Newby. Her English was fluent and correct, and her foreign accent gave point to her

stories, which were all of cosmopolitan people and in cynical demonstration of human folly. Their flavour was not sweet in the memory, but they suited the hour, because the hour was dominated by the lady who told them. For all the notice any one took of Amabel she might have been a wooden dummy; but she looked and listened and felt very well amused. It was after midnight when Madame Varasdin suddenly got up.

"Look at those women in mourning," she said audibly; "they are taking the table opposite us. We don't want to sit and stare at them. I hate anything gloomy."

"Are you busy to-morrow, Madame Varasdin?" said Mr. Ferrers.

The lady glanced at Mr. Newby, who turned red.

"Do you want me to take your niece to see the Tomb of Napoleon?" she asked.

"Something of the kind," said Mr. Ferrers. "I shall be busy till five. Could you come to lunch, and then take Amabel to the right milliners? I believe they are more important than the Tomb."

"I will come with pleasure," said Madame Varasdin. "I have one engagement to-morrow, but I can fix any time I choose for it. I will call for your niece in the morning and we will have lunch together, and at five — at five, when you are free, Mr. Ferrers, you will find us at Colombin's, the tea-house in the Rue Cambon, you know. Can I depend on you to pick us up there?"

“Certainly!” said Mr. Ferrers. “But how about your other engagement?”

“Six o’clock will do for that,” said Madame Varasdin. “We don’t dine till half-past seven. Mr. Newby, will you dine with us to-morrow at half-past seven?”

“With pleasure,” said Mr. Newby.

“I wish Varasdin had half the wits of his wife,” said Mr. Ferrers to Amabel, as they drove home together. “I call her a very agreeable woman, don’t you?”

“Ye-es,” said Amabel, with the uncertain assent that points to a contrary opinion. She could not keep her eyes off Madame Varasdin, but she was not at all sure that she thought her agreeable.

IV.

AMABEL had not seen the Tomb of Napoleon yet, but she had seen a Paris dressmaker and several Paris shops, and now she sat at one of Colombin's tea-tables, in a blouse and a hat and a ruffle that changed her in a twinkling from a moth to a butterfly. Her uncle had taken her breath away that morning by telling her, all in a hurry, while he drank his coffee and glanced at his financial papers, that he meant to provide for her, and that, as he had to be in Paris on and off till this affair of the Eugenia was settled, she might stay there for the present — in the hotel at first, and, when he ran back to Mexico, in a family or a Pension.

"You must ask Madame Varasdin about clothes," he said, with a glance at his niece's worse-for-wear guinea coat and skirt. "She appears to understand them. You can't go about with her dressed like a country cousin. I've plenty of money and nothing much to do with it, and no one belonging to me. You may just as well have a good time. I like the way you came here — straight off, on the chance. I've done things of that sort myself, and I'm on the top of the wave now. Here is some French money."

Mr. Ferrers had taken out a pocket-book and was

extracting French bank notes from it. He put five beside her, and she saw that each one was for a thousand francs.

"Oh!" she said, and her uncle looked at her with amusement. He enjoyed her surprise and confusion, and he enjoyed using some of his money in this novel way.

"It won't last you long if you go shopping with Madame Varasdin," he said. "She looks expensive. I don't know how a fool like her husband manages to pay for those diamonds."

"Is M. Varasdin a fool?" said Amabel.

"He's a fool who's always telling you he's a clever fellow," said Mr. Ferrers. "I'd any time rather deal with a clever fellow who tells me he's a fool."

Then he got up and put away his pocket-book, and said to Amabel that he must go about his business now, but that, if nothing happened to prevent it, he would take her to the opera to-night; and Amabel got ready for Madame Varasdin, having made up her mind that the first thing she would buy should be a silk dress for the cook.

"What do you want?" said Madame Varasdin, as they sat at lunch together.

"I believe I want everything — from your point of view," said Amabel, for the lady's walking gown and hat were as elegant as her evening raiment had been. "I am sure you would say my clothes were only fit for a bonfire."

"Clothes cost money," said Madame Varasdin, with the smile that seemed to shut her eyes. "Have you any idea of Paris prices? For a bolero and skirt I pay my tailor ——"

She paused, and her glance gauged Amabel's poor shrunken coat and skirt, and Amabel felt quite uncomfortable and in a hurry to cast it from her.

"The gown I am wearing cost twenty guineas," Madame Varasdin continued. "The little man who made it is rather clever. You might order two or three things from him to begin with."

"My uncle gave me five thousand francs this morning," said Amabel. "I thought it was a great deal and would last a long time. I should not like to spend it extravagantly."

"It won't go far if you want everything," said Madame Varasdin. "From what Hyacinth tells me of your uncle he could give you five thousand francs a week and never know he was spending money. But men are all the same. They expect a woman to spend a thousand francs and look like a thousand pounds. I told Hyacinth this morning that I wanted a new hat, and he threatened to commit suicide."

"Does he often do that?" said Amabel, puzzled by the lady's tranquil manner.

"Whenever anything annoys him," said Madame Varasdin. Then they called a cab and began the business of the day, and long before five o'clock

Amabel had spent most of her money. She had bought the silk dress and despatched it to the cook, and she had presented Madame Varasdin with a hat that the lady tried on and put down with a sigh because it cost five guineas. Amabel hardly ventured to offer it, but Madame Varasdin made the way easy for her, and accepted it with so much grace that the girl saw that she had done the right thing. And now here they were at Colombin's drinking tea and eating little muffins, and looking at English cakes that were not quite what English cakes should be, because they were neither stale nor stodgy. The rooms were very full and cheerful, and most people were talking English and American.

"Are there no French people in Paris?" said Amabel.

"It is not easy to come across them," said Madame Varasdin. "I have lived here for a year and know none."

"Where did you live before?" said Amabel, and as the question passed her lips she knew she would have done better not to ask it.

"I have lived in every capital in Europe," said Madame Varasdin. "My husband's affairs are always taking him to fresh places."

As she replied her husband came in, accompanied by Mr. Ferrers. The two men were talking as they crossed the outer shop. They stopped inside the room to talk, and when they reached their own party they

were still at the height of their argument, and had only a formal greeting for the ladies.

"What has happened?" said Madame Varasdin.

"That's what we want to know," said her husband.

"It's Eugenias," said Mr. Ferrers, "and I believe it's Mexican Jem."

He looked cool and angry, and M. Varasdin looked uncomfortable. Amabel began to understand that the money she had been spending so easily was not always made with ease of mind.

"Something must have gone wrong over there," said M. Varasdin.

"I don't believe it," said Mr. Ferrers. "Mexican Jem is banging the market; that's all."

"But Eugenias are on offer all over the place," said M. Varasdin, in an explanatory way to his wife. "They're as flat as ditchwater. It's easy enough to say it's banging ——"

"Can't you find out what has happened?" said Madame Varasdin.

"No, we can't," said Mr. Ferrers. "The mine is fifty miles from anywhere. Of course we have wired to the new manager, but we have had no answer."

"Who is Mexican Jem?" said Amabel.

"A man who was buying all the Eugenias he could get a week or two ago," said her uncle.

"But he's off them now, and I wish I was," said M. Varasdin. "It's too much of a gamble."

"Have you any?" said his wife.

"I'm sorry to say I have a thousand in my pocket."

He opened a letter case, and took from it the certificate of the shares. It lay open on the table for any one to see, and Amabel looked at the wording curiously.

"Well, I've made up my mind," said Mr. Ferrers; "I'm going straight over there. In case anything has gone wrong, I'd rather be on the spot. But I shall leave orders that if Mexican Jem offers a line tomorrow they are taken for me."

"What we want is to get Wolfenstein interested in them," said M. Varasdin. "He would strengthen our faction."

"Wolfenstein's hands are not clean," said Mr. Ferrers.

Varasdin shrugged his shoulders.

"Business is business," said he; "Wolfenstein is a very clever man. He made a quarter of a million last year, and this year he's doing better still; and you should see the names of the people who go to his wife's parties. They don't seem to mind about his hands."

"I'm rather nice about my name," said Mr. Ferrers. "I've never been mixed up with a shady lot yet."

"If you talk like that to my husband he will think you are not a good man of business," said Mme. Varasdin.

"Well, I'm going to score off Mexican Jem," said Mr. Ferrers.

"Or he'll score off us," said M. Varasdin, looking dolefully at the Eugenia shares.

Amabel thought her uncle's glance took the other man's measure and found him wanting.

"I'll let you out if you like," said Mr. Ferrers; "I'll take back your little lot."

"Done," said Varasdin eagerly.

"Perhaps you are throwing away a good thing," said Mme. Varasdin rather anxiously. Mr. Ferrers had taken out his cheque-book, and was filling in a cheque.

"I'll give you your thousand pounds," he said, with an air of conviction that was impressive. "You couldn't get the price in London or here this afternoon. But I believe in Eugenias."

"I can't afford a gamble," said Varasdin sulkily. "My expenses are too heavy."

Mr. Ferrers tore off the cheque and presented it to M. Varasdin. For a few minutes there was a lull at that particular tea-table, and Amabel wondered what was going to happen. She saw that her uncle's thoughts were far away from the Parisian tea-house. He consulted first a calendar and then a railway timetable, and then he looked at his watch.

"I can just do it," he said. "But I must be at the Nord in half-an-hour."

As if each minute had grown precious, he pushed back his chair and got up, but his eyes fell on Amabel,

and he sat down again. She looked at him expectantly.

"I can't take you to the opera till I come back," he said; "I must go to Mexico at once and find out what has happened. I'll leave you all the French money I have, and I'll pay up at the hotel, and I'll send you a cheque. You mustn't stay on at the Ritz by yourself. Mme. Varasdin, can you tell my niece of a comfortable pension? If not, she had better go straight to England."

"When shall you be back, Uncle Michael?" said Amabel, and she looked at him rather wistfully.

"It is sure to be weeks, it might be months," said Mr. Ferrers. "I may find the new manager is making a mess of things. You must send me your address, of course. I'll wire you mine. You'll be all right, you know. So shall I—at least I hope I shall— Anyhow—if I'm not all right—give me that certificate, Varasdin—I believe you will be with this—but take care of it, my dear—they're bearer shares."

"What is it?" said Amabel, taking the paper from her uncle.

"It's a thousand Eugenias," said Mr. Ferrers.

"Mademoiselle enters the affair in the pleasantest way," said M. Varasdin. "She takes no risk, and the chance of a big profit. Even to-day, when things look so black, that little bit of paper could be sold for eight or nine hundred pounds, Mademoiselle."

"But I have just seen you sell it for a thousand," Amabel reminded him.

"The prices of such things go up and down," her uncle explained to her. "These shares may be worth a good many thousands soon. Keep them tight till I wire to you to sell, and remember that they are unregistered and can be stolen as easily as a bank-note."

"But how shall I sell them?" said Amabel.

"Go to a respectable stockbroker," said Mr. Ferrers.

"I don't know one," said Amabel.

"You know me," said M. Varasdin. "I shall be happy to give you any assistance in my power while your uncle is away."

"Are you a stockbroker?" said Amabel.

"I am not exactly on the Bourse," said M. Varasdin, taking a fine attitude. "I keep outside and have more scope. I am what you call a financier."

"Oh!" said Amabel uncomprehendingly; and she took the certificate of the shares back from Madame Varasdin, who had been studying it intently. "I suppose I'm worth robbing," she said to her uncle, as she put the certificate and the French money into her purse.

"You will be in six weeks' time, I hope," said he; and then he got up, and his glance lingered a little on her pretty face, and he could see that she was more concerned about his going away than about the money he had given her.

"Come back soon, Uncle Michael," she said, as she stood at the door with him for a moment.

"Suppose I didn't — you'd be all right, you know, my dear. If I live I'll send you money; and if I don't, you're my legal heir. I'll write to my solicitors and tell them about you before I leave New York. Take care of your Eugenias, and don't trust that Varasdin too much. I heard things I don't like about him to-day. I'm glad to have done with him as far as business goes. I dare say he'll do in private life."

"What do you think of Madame Varasdin?" said Amabel rather anxiously.

"I think she's a clever woman," said Mr. Ferrers, signing to a cab-driver. "She will tell you how to dress and where to live, and that is all you want of her. I could see she was furious because her husband wouldn't keep his Eugenias. She has the wit to believe in me. I'm not going to take you with me now because I must race the clock, and you'd be in my way. You talk to Madame Varasdin about a boarding-house, and settle in somewhere to-night. I shall be back before you've time to turn around. Good-bye."

Mr. Ferrers kissed his niece and took off his hat to the Varas dins, who were approaching the door. He showed the cab-driver a twenty-franc piece, and told him what he must do to get it, and so in a twinkling he clattered out of the narrow side-street into the Rue de Rivoli. Amabel watched the cab, and then walked

slowly towards the Boulevards with the Varasdins. She felt forlorn.

“What are you going to do now, Mademoiselle?” said M. Varasdin.

“My uncle told me to make inquiries about a pension,” said Amabel. “Do you know of one?”

“How would you like to come and stay with us?” said Mme. Varasdin.

V

"WITH you?" repeated Amabel, a good deal surprised and puzzled. The proposal was made in such a business-like tone that she guessed a business-like idea must be at the back of it; and she looked at Mme. Varasdin's hat and gown and jewels, and wondered.

"We have a flat in the best part of Paris," continued Mme. Varasdin. "From our balcony you can see Mont Valérien if you look one way, and the Arc de Triomphe if you look the other. We are close to the Bois."

"But surely I should be in your way?" said Amabel.

"No," said Mme. Varasdin. "We have often had some one with us for a time. When my old friend, Baron Rosenmeyer, went on a financial mission to Turkey, he confided his only daughter to my care. He paid me — what is it in your English money? — seven guineas a week."

Twenty-four hours ago Amabel would have known that Mme. Varasdin asked too much; but the day's work had left her ideas about money quite topsyturvy. In a city where people paid five guineas for a straw hat trimmed with a couple of quills, and thirty guineas for a cashmere gown, a guinea a day

for board and lodging sounded almost moderate. She had a pocketful of money, her uncle had promised her a cheque, and she had the thousand Eugenias.

"If you are quite sure I shall not be in your way —" she began again, embarrassed by the difficulty of rejecting the idea and uncertain whether she fancied it.

"Come and try," said Mme. Varasdin. "If you don't like us, you can any day go to a pension; but I think you will like us. I am sure your uncle would be glad to hear you were with me, and not with strangers."

So the matter was settled, and Amabel went back to the hotel and collected her things, and at seven o'clock she was driving out to Mme. Varasdin's flat in the Avenue Ernani. It was still light, and as she drove across the Place de la Concorde and up the Champs Elysées, she felt glad that she was to stay in this beautiful, happy-looking city, where she would see the golden side of life, she who had seen the drab side ever since she could remember. She was adrift here, but she would have been adrift in London too, for she had no friends there. The few friends left to her lived in a grimy little Lancashire town, where her parents had lived and struggled with debt, and died. She loved her own country, but her memories of it, though they were tender, were sad. Her drive through Paris on this brilliant evening was like a dancing tune that sets your spirits dancing to its own measure.

Mme. Varasdin received her, and took her into a small drawing-room that communicated with a larger one by means of glass doors. It had a parqueted floor, the inevitable mirror over the mantelpiece, a walnut centre table, and some damaged-looking red satin chairs.

"This is the room I shall give you," said Mme. Varasdin. "The bedstead will be brought down from the attic after dinner; and there is a washstand too, the very one I bought for Amalie von Rosenmeyer. You see your window opens on to the balcony, so you will have a fine view."

Amabel thought she would rather have had a wardrobe and a chest of drawers. An anteroom with a table and chairs did not come up to her British ideas of comfort and privacy so well as a Bloomsbury attic where you can lock your one door and put away your clothes. The doors leading into the salon were curtained, but she could find neither key nor bolt to them; and through her window she could see the boots of some one sitting on the balcony.

"Mr. Newby is here," said Mme. Varasdin. "He will dine with us. It is not necessary to dress for dinner. If you take off your hat you will be ready."

Amabel thought that, under the circumstances, a more prolonged toilet would have been difficult to manage; so she took off her hat and then followed her hostess on to the balcony. The boots, she found, belonged to Mr. Newby, who rose to greet her. He

looked younger than ever, and when he saw his hostess's tea-gown he stuck his monocle into his eye and said —

“I say, Madame Varasdin! what a rippin’ dress and what rippin’ flowers! Did you have the flowers made for you? I never saw any like ’em!”

For Mme. Varasdin’s toilet had not been accomplished by taking off a hat. She wore a loose greenish-blue gown that hung as Amabel had never seen a gown hang before, and chains of uncut turquoises and great jewelled clasps and flowers with all the blues and greens of heaven blended in their petals.

“They are ixias,” said Anastasie, and then M. Varasdin appeared and they went in to dinner.

It was a very good dinner, but Amabel did not know whether the talk that went on was good or bad, because she could not follow it. She was never quite sure whether people or speculations or both together were being discussed, and she felt rather pleased when Mr. Varasdin coupled together two names she had heard before, and told Mr. Newby that Mexican Jem had cleared out of Eugenias, and that instead of rising like rockets they were dropping like sticks.

“I suppose even Mexican Jem may make a mistake,” said Mr. Newby.

“Well, I’ve left them alone,” said M. Varasdin. “I’m afraid of a gamble, and I don’t mind who knows it.”

“What will happen to my Eugenias if they drop

like sticks?" said Amabel. It was the first time she had entered into the conversation.

"Your Eugenias?" said Mr. Newby.

"My uncle gave me a thousand," said Amabel, and she opened the bag hanging at her side and passed the certificate across the table to Mr. Newby. He glanced at it and was going to pass it back, when Mme. Varasdin took it from him.

"Sell them to me to-night for five hundred pounds," she said; "I love a gamble."

"Don't do it," said Varasdin, addressing his wife with such sudden and violent excitement that his two guests felt quite alarmed. "Don't do it. Mexican Jem has got even. So have I, and we know what we are about. Mr. Ferrers has given mademoiselle a bagatelle. In a fortnight they may not be worth five pounds. Besides, where will you get five hundred pounds? Do you think I will give five hundred pounds for such wickedness? Do you think I have them to give? Will you pay for your own gambles, then, madame? You always think you know best and that I am a fool, but I, Hyacinth Louis Varasdin, tell you there is nothing in Eugenias, nothing at all."

He brought his hand down on the table with such a bang that his wine glasses tottered, and the maid-servant nearly dropped the dish in her hands. Anastasie only blinked at her husband.

"I don't agree with you, Varasdin," said Mr. Newby, in his queer, high, young voice. "I believe

they'll come out right in the end. If any one had chucked a thousand at me I should stick to 'em."

"I must stick to them," said Amabel, restoring the certificate to her purse. "My uncle told me not to sell them till he wired."

"You must take care of your purse, then," said Mr. Newby. "Any one who stole it could sell them. They're bearer shares."

"What disagreeable ideas you have," said Mme. Varasdin, getting up from table.

But Mr. Newby's manner had put Amabel uncomfortably on her guard, and for at least a week she slept with her purse under her pillow. She did not know what degree of distrust her fellow-countryman meant to instil, or which member of the household inspired it, but she thought it could not be Mme. Varasdin. Mr. Newby's case with regard to her was plain, and what puzzled Amabel was M. Varasdin's alternate blindness and fidgety interference. He fawned on the young man in his presence, and called him a "beefsteak" when his back was turned, and Amabel found that by a beefsteak her host meant some one rude and loutish and dull of mind. She wondered whether Mme. Varasdin called her names the moment she was out of hearing. Her respect for the husband and wife did not grow with her sojourn in their house, but they laid themselves out to please her, and she was neither uncomfortable nor unhappy as a rule. She soon discovered that they had dreadful and

frequent scenes with each other, and at first, after hearing their voices raised in shrill vituperation, she used to feel ashamed to look them in the face. But they were so unashamed themselves that she began to take these storms for granted, as you take thunder for granted when you travel to a hotter climate. They were invariably about money, although Mr. Newby's name somehow got mixed up with them every time.

Of course Amabel's life had given her no social experience, but even she perceived that the Varasdins were not in good position. They seemed to know no French people at all, but only a cosmopolitan rabble of artists and business men. The artists were obscure and impecunious, and the business men came from heaven knows where, and made their money heaven knows how. They would squander money one day and borrow the next, and as lief get the best of a bargain with a friend as with an enemy. Their women-kind were not always as doubtful and displeasing as they were themselves. The matrons were often absorbed in domestic affairs and greatly tried by the ups and downs of life. There was one very fat lady who told Amabel that she never knew whether her husband would come back from business with a diamond necklace for her, or with a revolver that he proposed to hold first to her head and then to his own. She had been through every extreme of fortune with him, and had nearly starved while he was well fed in an Austrian prison. She was rather proud

of the prison episode, and said that Mathias had been the victim of a brother's guile. But when Amabel saw Mathias she thought a man with those eyes could not be without guile himself. He was a good-natured person, devoted to his fat wife and his grown-up daughters, and inclined to make a pet of Amabel. Just at present he was living in great magnificence on the Champs Elysées, and the eldest daughter was about to marry a Berlin stockbroker. The Varasdins, with Amabel, were invited to the wedding and to a reception at the house the night before.

VI

THE Varasdins were sitting on the balcony with Mr. Newby and Amabel. Below them the long double line of young chestnuts stretched to right and left as far as the eye could follow, the tall white houses rose high above the trees, and the street lights flashed amongst their branches. The busy traffic of the city sounded far away, and the people strolling along the pavement beneath were not present in any disturbing degree to the people on the balcony. At the windows of the opposite houses there was no sign of the inhabitants, except the lace curtains with which they shut themselves in. The stars were coming out in a clear sky, and from the hills beyond the Bois a pleasant breeze swept through the avenue towards Paris.

"It is my birthday to-morrow," Mme. Varasdin was saying. "What will you give me, Hyacinth?"

"Everything I have is yours already," said Hyacinth.

"But you haven't much," said Anastasie. "I want a string of real pearls."

"I will give you the pearls and mademoiselle the Koh-i-noor on the same day. I can get one as easily as the other."

"Pearls are beastly expensive things," said Mr. Newby. "Don't see much good in them either."

"You haven't seen the gown I am going to wear at the Gregorios'," said Mme. Varasdin; "pearls would be the making of it."

"How much is the gown going to cost?" inquired M. Varasdin.

"You will see when the bill comes in," said Anastasie blandly.

"Paris is a very costly place," said Amabel. "I've spent all the money Uncle Michael left me and about half the cheque he sent. I can't think what poor people do here. How do they exist, Mme. Varasdin?"

"I take no interest in them. It is so easy to make money that people who are poor are stupid. I prefer to contemplate people like the Gregorios. They understand the art of life."

"You mean they understand the art of swindling," said Mr. Newby.

Amabel looked up rather startled and expecting Mme. Varasdin to take offense, but she only laughed.

"You like a man who sits in a prison one year and buys a palace the next," said M. Varasdin.

"I like a man who can get into a palace after a prison," said his wife. "You want brains and energy to do that."

Something in her tone and glance made her husband wince and then bluster.

"Gregorio is a rogue," he shouted; "Gregorio made

all his money out of that Coal Syndicate, and it was one of the biggest frauds. He has ruined thousands."

"And we're all going to dance at his daughter's wedding to-morrow," piped Mr. Newby. "I suppose he'll have good champagne."

"I taught him how to play ping-pong the other day," said Amabel. "He didn't like picking up the balls; he is so fat. He is always very kind, and when Jeanne Gregorio spilt her wine on the governess's dress I saw him give her a hundred-franc note for a new one. Mrs. Hunter was highly respectable, and I never had enough to eat in her house, and she nagged from morning till night. It seems that swindlers are agreeable people to live with."

"Quite," said Mr. Newby, "as long as you drink their champagne and pocket their bank notes and don't trust them with a penny. If that governess saved all her life for her old age, and put her savings into his hands, he'd foist some of his rotten stuff on her without a pang, and to-morrow she'd be in the workhouse, and he'd be giving a party, and you and I would be drinking his champagne. That's how it's done, Miss Ferrers. Be Gregorio, or be you or me, but don't be some poor devil who starves and scrapes and ends in the gutter after all."

"People are not forced to speculate; they are so greedy," said M. Varasdin.

"Oh! of course, the lamb should keep away from the wolf," said Mr. Newby.

"After all, the *raison d'être* of a lamb is to be eaten," said Mme. Varasdin. "You like it yourself for dinner."

Later on in the evening, when Mr. Newby had departed, the husband and wife still sat together on the balcony. It was a most unusual thing for them to do.

"I've the devil's luck lately," began the man.

"That's nothing new," said the lady.

"There must be a smash soon."

"That's why I made a bid for the pearls."

"What will they be worth if you get them? I want thousands. The moment I touch anything it comes to grief. The moment I take my hands off it prospers. I tell you I've the devil's luck."

"I'm sure I had when I married you," said Anastasie.

"It's your extravagance that brings us to ruin," said Hyacinth.

"I want money and I mean to have it," said his wife. "I'd rather be dead than poor. People who can't make money out of a world full of imbeciles deserve all the kicks they get. It is the one thing worth doing, and if I were a man I would do it or go out. What is the use of health or beauty or brains except as a means to money? Life without it is a martyrdom that lasts as long as life itself. I, at any rate, care for nothing else, desire nothing else. If I were a man I would have striven for it with so single a mind, with such a fierce determination, that I tell you

I would have got it. No obstacles should have hindered me; I would have thrust them aside. No difficulties should have baffled me; I would have mastered them. How can a man be so indolent, so dull, so poor in spirit? You have no money? Go out into the market-place and make some, fool. You play the poorest part of all—you wolf—who never brings home his lamb.”

“Oh! you have a tongue,” said M. Varasdin; “I never denied that.”

Then he got out a pencil and a pocket-book, and did little sums, and he got more and more excited and unhappy, and at last he dashed them both to the ground and said he could not stand this state of things any longer, and that unless Anastasie came to his assistance he would go straight downstairs and throw himself into the Seine.

“What do you expect me to do?” said Anastasie.

“Get hold of money—somehow—anyhow.”

“If you would be obliging enough to throw yourself into the Seine, I might marry Mr. Newby. The stupid young man is rich.”

“I’m not going to drown myself to please you,” said M. Varasdin.

“I am convinced you will not drown yourself. It would take a little courage and perhaps be unpleasant.”

“Some day I shall kill you,” snarled the man.

Mme. Varasdin got up.

"I have often thought one of us would be better out of the way," she said.

But next day a basket of roses arrived for her, and amongst the roses there was a jeweller's case, and in the case there was a string of pearls and Mr. Newby's card. She held them up triumphantly.

"You may give me another string whenever you like," she said to Hyacinth.

"Mr. Newby is very gallant," he observed, and Amabel, who was present, looked in vain for any trace of embarrassment in his manner or in his wife's. They were well satisfied. At night, when she went to the Gregorios', Mme. Varasdin wore the pearls round her neck, and the eyes of every woman in the room followed her with longing. The type of woman gathered there would rather have pearls than love or honour or renown.

"If you have the wits of a sparrow you'll make money out of this," she said to her husband. "Every one will think you've given them to me. Pearls mean money, and money means credit."

"No one will think I have given them to you," growled M. Varasdin. "Haven't you come here with that English booby at your heels?"

"But, my dear, you are dull beyond understanding. Isn't Miss Ferrers at my heels, too, and isn't she the prettiest girl in the room?"

"I may be dull," said M. Varasdin; "but I'm sharp enough to see the fellow can't keep his eyes off

you. He's too raw and silly to care about a beautiful girl."

With this back-hander the exasperated gentleman sheered off, and the moment he did so Mr. Newby deserted Amabel for the lady of riper years and more subtle charm. He sat down beside Mme. Varasdin, and looked through his single eyeglass at the splendid rooms and at the people moving about in them, and when they were unusually odd he asked her to explain them. Sometimes he made a remark that surprised her by its shrewdness, but she found his conversation on the whole extremely dull.

Like most continentals, she failed entirely to understand a man of Mr. Newby's type, a type so common at home that every playing-field is full of it, and every battle is fought by it, and every ship manned by it. He was one of the swarm of clean-shaven, clean-minded English boys, with brains that never dazzle and never collapse, and a character that will neither tell lies nor forgive them. Even his civilisation was of a kind she could not discover or appreciate. She saw that he was awkward and tongue-tied, and she did not understand why he called Egon Rosenmeyer a bounder. She thought Egon Rosenmeyer charming. He had curly hair and an impudent tongue, his anecdotes had to be whispered, he was a facile musician, and as for his *bonnes fortunes*, they were like the waves of the sea, countless and overlapping. He was always ready to tell her about them, too, and

she wished he would sit beside her instead of Mr. Newby.

"There's that little beast of a Rosenmeyer getting introduced to Miss Ferrers," said Mr. Newby. "How sick she'll be."

"Go, and rescue her, then, and send Egon to me. I like him."

"How can any one like him?"

"What's wrong with him?" asked Mme. Varasdin.

But to explain that was, of course, beyond Mr. Newby's powers.

"A man should have some muscle," he said.

Mme. Varasdin's eyes fixed themselves on Mr. Newby's large, sunburnt hand. He had taken one glove off and wore the other.

"He should if he wants to be a railway porter and shoulder trunks, or a drayman and roll about barrels of beer," she said. "I don't know what use muscles are to you and M. Rosenmeyer, or what ornament. It is a superstition Europe does not share with you. Nowadays, even a war is waged with brains — a successful war, that is; you will find it out some day when you are face to face with a civilised people."

"H—m," said Mr. Newby. He did not get up because he saw that Amabel was coming towards them with her new cavalier in tow. Her face and figure and air were all English; her clothes and her coiffure were all French; and so she was, as Mme. Varasdin had said, the prettiest girl in the room.

"What do you think M. Rosenmeyer has just told me?" she said. "Mexican Jem is coming here to-night."

"How have the Gregorios managed that?" said Mme. Varasdin.

"I'm surprised myself," said M. Rosenmeyer. "Old Gregorio told me the moment I arrived. He keeps running to the stairs and watching for him. If he was expecting a royal duke he could not be in a greater fuss."

"If a royal duke came here it would be to borrow money," said Mme. Varasdin. "If Mexican Jem only looks your way you make it. He is a more important guest to old Gregorio than any duke could be."

"But who is Mexican Jem?" asked Amabel.

"A financial power," said M. Rosenmeyer.

"But if he is English, how is it these foreigners know him?"

"The whole world knows him since he brought out the great El Paso Mine," said Mr. Newby.

"Is he very rich?" asked Mme. Varasdin.

"If I had a year of his income I'd never do a day's work again," said M. Rosenmeyer.

"He's an awfully decent chap, too," said Mr. Newby. "As straight as they make 'em."

"Oh! do you believe that of anybody?" said M. Rosenmeyer, who understood the English idiom. "I myself am strictly honourable, but I never expect to find other people so."

"H—m," said Mr. Newby again, and M. Rosenmeyer had no notion that the inarticulate English lad had taken his measure.

"I think Mexican Jem must have come," said Amabel. "There's a buzz near that further door."

"I see him," said Mr. Newby. "He has just come into the room with Mme. Gregorio."

"They crowd round him so," complained Mme. Varasdin, "any one would think he was going to throw them shares to scramble for."

She got up and went towards the centre of the room, followed by Amabel and the two young men. They made a little separate group as the host and hostess, accompanied by a tall, distinguished-looking man, steered their way. Amabel's eyes were uncertain and astonished, and she turned to Mr. Newby.

"Do you mean that tall, fair man?" she said. "He has just been stopped by some one."

"That's him," said Mr. Newby.

"That Mexican Jem!" cried Amabel, and her voice carried a little further than it should have done. The gentleman looked straight at her and smiled.

"Why, he knows you," said Mme. Varasdin. "He is coming to us. You must present him to me."

VII

"OF course he knows me," said Amabel. "It is Mr. Sheringham. I never heard him called Mexican Jem."

"Then you didn't keep company with the Stock Exchange," said Mr. Newby, and the next moment he and Amabel were shaking hands with the guest of the evening. Madame Varasdin edged herself a little in front of Amabel as soon as she could, and set herself to capture Mr. Sheringham. She could not distinguish between simple and simpleton, and she expected to play with the three people born under the Union Jack as a juggler plays with balls, throwing one away to catch the other and yet keeping them all in hand. Large as her experience was of men, she had never come across one yet whose directness was the very weapon with which he turned her subtleties, and whose strength against her lay partly in his want of taste for the exotic. The impression she made on Mr. Sheringham was of a tall, thin woman, who had eyes like a Jap and such a fidgety way with her hands that she pulled at her handkerchief while she talked to him. Her gold-embroidered gown was no doubt very fine, but it was a gown that persistently got in front of Amabel, and the first moment he could he walked round it.

"Come and have an ice, Miss Ferrers," he said, and gave Amabel his arm and walked off with her.

"That's Mexican Jem," said Mr. Newby. "What he wants he takes, and you can no more stop him than a pebble can stop a steam roller."

"Do fetch me an ice," said Mme. Varasdin. But when the young man came back with it he could not find her. He stood about for a time and felt rather bored and then he went away. He knew when he bought the pearls that he was playing the fool, and to-night he knew it with still greater conviction. The lady did not care a straw for him, and all her lures were spread for his money. He thought the game would soon come to an end. It had been amusing, costly, and instructive, and he was beginning to tire of it. He detested the husband, and his admiration of the wife was not the admiration of esteem; it was not even the tolerant, half-contemptuous admiration men feel for a sinner who is her own enemy and no one else's. The boy had been fascinated and was coming to his senses.

Meanwhile Madame Varasdin sat in a corner of the balcony with Egon Rosenmeyer and told him how badly Mr. Newby bored her. The balcony was furnished with palms and wicker chairs, and lighted with Chinese lanterns that were bobbing in the breeze; and Madame Varasdin herself, with her narrow eyes and clinging gown, looked like one of the ivory-headed ladies on the fan she had just unfurled.

"He is as dull and heavy as his national food," she said, "and the girl is as excellent and insipid. Between the two I am having a time. Oh! I assure you it is not gay at home now. What a race! And it is always they who have the money."

"If you want money you should make eyes at the other one," said M. Rosenmeyer. "What became of him?"

"He walked away with mademoiselle," said Mme. Varasdin. "But they are astounding, these ladies and gentlemen. Their tongues are spiritless, their manners are rude, their flirtations are scandalous. Yet to all the world they give themselves airs."

"Let us talk of something agreeable," said M. Rosenmeyer. "Have you heard Yvette's last song?"

Sheringham had taken Amabel to the further end of the balcony which ran along two sides of the corner house in which the Gregorios lived. He fetched her an ice and some champagne, and then he sat down and looked at her.

"What has happened to you?" he said. "Do you remember the last time we met—in Mrs. Hunter's drawing-room—you said you were going to Eastbourne next day—and I said I would run down there too. I never did. I was detained by business."

"I know," said Amabel sedately. "You were banging the market."

"What?" said Sheringham.

Amabel took the train of her white satin gown out of danger.

"You nearly upset that champagne," she said.

"No wonder. What do you know about markets?"

"Nothing at all. But when my uncle went off in a hurry to Mexico ——"

"Your uncle?"

"Uncle Michael."

"Michael Ferrers! 'Eugenia' Ferrers! Is he your uncle? Then that explains the cook."

"The cook! Oh! do you mean Mrs. Pugsley?"

"I dare say I do," said Sheringham. "I made her acquaintance last Sunday. I wanted to see you again, and, as it was the only way open to me, I dropped in to lunch at Bayswater Square. I expected to meet you at lunch, of course; but when we went down, there sat all those pasty-faced children and a pasty-faced old dragon with them."

"Mrs. Hunter sent me out of the house," said Amabel.

"So I was given to understand, when I made inquiries after lunch."

"Did she say I was horrid?"

"What she said is of no importance. At the time it made me rather angry, and I suppose I showed it ——"

"Oh!" said Amabel, with breathless interest. "Did she shrivel up?"

"Not perceptibly. Our parting was what you may

call strained. She pretended not to know where you were."

"Did you ask her?"

"Of course I did."

"That would have made her angry."

"Yes," said Mr. Sheringham pensively, "there were some feathers flying. The sort of feathers that do fly in drawing-rooms, you know. I hate a row with a woman."

"Oh! did you have a row?" said Amabel. "Do tell me what happened."

"Nothing happened. I said it was downright wicked to send a girl like you adrift in London for no reason whatever, and that seemed to annoy her. I walked out of the house in a rage, and then that red-headed Buttons came tearing after me ——"

"Oh! Ginger," said Amabel. "I like Ginger."

"So do I," said Mr. Sheringham. "He stopped me and said, 'Would I please wait a minute and speak to the cook?' I was just asking him what the — what the message signified, when the cook herself appeared."

"She's an old dear," said Amabel. "I love her more than some fine ladies."

"I love her too," said Mr. Sheringham. "We went inside the Square garden, and sat down on a bench, and she said she hoped she wasn't taking a liberty, but she thought I might like to know as Miss Ferrers was gone to live in Paris with an uncle as was a mil-

lionaire. We were more than half-an-hour together, and had a most interesting conversation. She told me ever so many things I wanted to know."

"What sort of things?"

"Oh! little things — about you — and your career as a governess to five pasty-faced children — and why she took to you from the first moment she ever set eyes on you — and how the cloak she was wearing came from you — and that you were living with some people called Varasdin, in the Avenue Ernani — and then we said good-bye — she sent you her respects — and some day when I get married, she is coming to be my cook."

"But I don't agree to that," cried Amabel. "She is coming to live with Uncle Michael and me — when we settle down together."

"So yesterday I came to Paris and stumbled against old Gregorio first thing. I asked him if he knew the Varasdins and you — and he asked me here to meet you. That's my story. Now, what do you mean with your talk about banging markets?"

"Uncle Michael said it must be you — when he went off in a hurry — because Eugenias went down."

"It wasn't me. Of course, they went down. The reef is pinched out. They're no good. Your uncle must have lost a big slice of his million over them, I'm afraid."

"I'm sorry they're no good," said Amabel, who did not feel much affected by the news of her uncle's mis-

fortunes. The journey through life of a speculator presented itself to her mind like a switchback with violent ups and downs that the traveller took as a matter of course.

"I'm uncommonly sorry too," said Mr. Sheringham.

"I have a thousand," explained Amabel. "What does 'pinched out' mean?"

"No gold. I got the news through a private source the day after I saw you, and wired from Havre to sell. But Mr. Ferrers must have had the news soon after me."

"My uncle will be sorry," said Amabel. "He seemed to take such an interest in Eugenias."

"They've been very interesting lately," said Sheringham. "I've dropped about a hundred thousand on them myself."

"Then M. Varasdin was right," said Amabel. "He was afraid of them."

"What sort of people are the Varasdins?"

"He is a financier, whatever that may mean," said Amabel.

"I know pretty well what it means in his case. M. Gregorio gave me a confidential sketch of his friend's career. It has been chequered and sometimes cloudy. I was thinking of the husband and wife together and of their relation to you. How did your uncle come to place you with them?"

Amabel explained, and said that she was not uncomfortable.

"The lady wears very fine pearls," said Sheringham.

"Oh! Mr. Newby gave her those," said Amabel. Mr. Sheringham looked thoughtful.

"I want to come and see you," he said. "Are you having much fun? Do these people show you Paris?"

"We go to theatres and cafés. We never do the things I am dying to do."

"What are you dying to do?"

"I want to go to St. Germain in a steam tram and gather lilies of the valley and Solomon's Seal in the forest. Jeanne Gregorio went with her governess the other day. She says it was like a journey in a dream. You fly along the road opposite people you have never seen, past villages and a winding river, and trees and fields. There are lovely colours and effects of light and water, she says, and then you arrive at a palace and a forest and the forest is full of flowers. Jeanne Gregorio enjoys her life very much. Yesterday she went up the Seine in a penny boat as far as the Jardin des Plantes. She says she had never known before how beautiful Paris was."

"We might do that any day," said Mr. Sheringham, and he suggested that they should find Madame Varasdin and make a plan for to-morrow. So they got up and walked along the balcony and came upon the lady still sitting with M. Rosenmeyer. She accepted Mr. Sheringham's invitation to lunch, and managed with considerable skill to engage his atten-

tion and to exclude the others. Egon Rosenmeyer understood at once that he was ousted, and went back to the salon. Amabel soon began to think she had better go back too. She felt in the way. She sat behind Madame Varasdin and could only see Mr. Sheringham over the lady's shoulder and fan, and she could not join in their talk because it was in French and all about a new farce she had not seen. Besides, Madame Varasdin did not give her a chance. Presently the strains of Jeanne Gregorio's violin floated towards her from inside the house and she got up. But as she reached the window she came into collision with M. Varasdin, who rushed on to the balcony with a newspaper in his hand.

"Look! Look!" he cried excitedly to his wife. "My luck! my usual luck! or is it a lie? or was the bad news a lie? Is the whole thing a swindle, or am I a fool?"

"Since you ask me—you are probably a fool," said Mme. Varasdin, taking the paper from her husband's trembling hand and trying to read it by the light of the nearest lantern. M. Varasdin turned to Amabel.

"It is you who are lucky if it is true," he shrieked, and the idea seemed to give him more pain than pleasure.

"What has happened?" said Amabel.

"You hold Eugénias, don't you—a thousand Eugénias? A new reef has been struck—it is a big

strike — they'll go up — the devil knows where they'll go — I should have made my fortune ——”

He stopped because his anger and excitement were literally choking him. He tumbled into a chair, breathing hard, still muttering to himself, demoralised and helpless. The paper fluttered from Madame Varasdin's hands. She was hard hit too. Mr. Sheringham picked it up.

“May I see?” he said.

“Does it affect you?” said Amabel, watching him.

“I am in the same boat as this gentleman,” he said, with a glance at M. Varasdin's huddled figure. “I had my chance and lost it. I sold when there was a slump.”

“Oh! but there is an important difference between you and this gentleman,” said Mme. Varasdin bitterly. “In your affairs the matter is probably a trifle.”

VIII

AMABEL did not like M. Varasdin, because he had a florid manner and a deceitful tongue, yet she sometimes pitied him. He cringed before his bland, masterful wife, and, in spite of his smiles and his flattering speeches, he had the look of a miserable man. Mme. Varasdin had hardly spoken to him as they drove home from the Gregorios', and her tone when she did was so slighting that Amabel marvelled at his endurance. She left them as soon as she could and went to bed, wishing she was not so lonely. Her mind was busy, her thoughts were dancing; when she looked at the glass her face astonished her. It had changed as a hill does when the sunlight suddenly falls there, and she felt so happy and so wide awake that she walked to and fro in her room and talked to the dream-sister she had wished for in many a sad hour and missed now when sorrow and poverty were left behind. The imaginary sister had always been a person of sense, however; had often kept up her courage; had sometimes convinced her that she was a fool, and to-night advised her to go to bed and to sleep as swiftly as she could. "Joy cometh in the morning," said the sister; and Amabel laughed as she shut her eyes.

Meanwhile the Varasdins had gone into the dining-

room and turned on the light. The man brought a bottle of syrup and a syphon of soda-water from the sideboard, and mixed a glass for his wife. He lit a cigarette for himself, and filled a liqueur glass with brandy. He did not sit down, but moved about the room in a sort of sulky silence, both defiant and afraid.

"If it was possible for you to speak without lying, I should like to know how much money you *have* got," began Anastasie, when she, too, had brooded in angry quiet over the grievance in her mind.

"I tell you I am ruined," said her husband. "Perhaps you will believe it when you see the chairs and tables sold."

He waited a moment to watch the effect of this admission, before he added: "and your jewels, my dear, they will be sold too."

But he might as well have watched a mask as his wife's face when she did not wish it to tell him anything. The contempt and anger she took no pains to hide gave him no fresh clue to any move she proposed to make in their present perilous position.

"What does this news mean exactly?" she said. "Suppose you held Eugénias?"

The man put his hands to his temples with a gesture of despair. There were lines of anger in his forehead that terribly debased his face, and his wife turned her eyes from him. She did not fear his impotent display of wrath, but it was an ugly spectacle.

"I ought to have had five thousand," he said. "I could cut my throat when I think of it."

"What will five thousand shares be worth in a week's time?"

"Don't ask me. I can't bear it, I tell you. If this news is true—if a great reef has been struck, the mine is what Ferrers said it was—there will be a rush—how can I tell you where they will go?—anywhere—to fifty—to a hundred—it just depends on the news. And I'm cleaned out. I could have paid for five thousand Eugénias when Ferrers was here; I have been dealing in Americans instead—and, as usual, a panic came. They have had my last franc—I'm cleaned out."

"Well," said Anastasie, "what do you mean to do?"

"What is there to do? What can a man do without money? I must *have* money," said M. Varasdin, and he brought down his clenched hand on the table so heavily that the glasses clattered.

"Oh! don't bluster when we're by ourselves," said Anastasie. "You have neither sense nor spirit, and breaking glass won't persuade me of the contrary. We have been married fourteen weary years. I ought to know you."

"I can't for the life of me see what *you* do, except squander any money I and other men are fools enough to give you," said M. Varasdin.

"Nevertheless it is I who have the brains," said

his wife. "When you are in a mess you always expect me to pull you out."

"Pull me out this time, then. I'm in pretty deep."

Madame Varasdin began to take off her long gloves with a slow, delicate care that preserved their shape.

"Of course, I know what you mean," she said. "You want the girl's Eugenias."

"I would go to hell for them," said Hyacinth Louis.

"They are in her purse."

"How can I get hold of her purse?"

"You wish me to do that, of course. It is not easy. Besides — if we had them — would it be safe to sell them?"

"As safe as changing a bank-note. I should go to Buda-Pesth and sell them through Uncle Joseph. He is always willing to help a man over a difficulty. I should give him a commission, and the money would be in the family. He has a great deal of family feeling."

"You never see either a danger or a mistake until it has you in its clutch," said Anastasie. "You were born a bungler. If we get these shares I shall take them to Uncle Joseph myself. Last time I saw him he said: 'My girl, you may help Hyacinth on his feet twenty times over and he will always return to the gutter. He is a *Schlemihl*. It is trouble thrown away to help a *Schlemihl*.'"

"Get the shares and you may call me any names you please," said M. Varasdin. "We will sell them

and settle down in a good climate and live easily and sleep softly. That is all I ask. I'm sick of work and struggle and failure."

"So am I," said his wife grimly.

"You will do it, then?"

"Is there anything else to do?"

The man shrank from the hatred and anger in his wife's low voice, and after she had gone he drank some more brandy and lit a fresh cigar and took up the evening paper again. But the paper contained nothing that could lead his thoughts from his own misfortunes. Except the one with theft in front of it he could not see a loophole through which he could crawl towards better days; and hitherto his thefts had not been of this kind. An unscrupulous financier brings more misery on people than any burglar can, but society has not consented yet to class them together. Varasdin had lived on the knave's borderland, sliding downhill on the whole and yet with his eyes on the region where men walk safely, though they bear a dishonoured name. He desired to be a flourishing rogue and not to sit in gaol again, where a man of his stomach suffers torture. Yet, think as he might, he could see no way but the one to prosperity, and all of a sudden further suspense and patience grew intolerable. With the weak man's longing for immediate action, even if it is untimely action, he threw down his paper, and, cigar in hand, marched straight into his wife's room. She had put on a thin white wrapper and was reading

a novel, and she looked up with a scowl as her husband opened the door.

"I've been thinking it over," he said. "We must get those Eugénias, and the sooner it's done the better."

"Well — get them, then," said his wife.

"You know I can't."

"Yes, I know."

"How will you set about it?"

"As I set about other things — when I see some hope of success."

"Why can't you go into her room and take them? She is probably asleep."

"How like you, to be satisfied with probability in such a case."

"I shall have to get them myself."

"I am not anxious for the job," said Anastasie, and she rose and came towards the door with the intention, he surmised, of shutting him out of the room. But he came further into it.

"You are sure you understand?" he said. "I owe money all round. I don't possess a hundred francs. if something isn't done to help me at once I'm a ruined man."

"You told me all this five minutes ago," said Mme. Varasdin. "I suppose that even if you are ruined I may brush my hair."

"We shall go under," he said, throwing out his hands. "We may go and beg in the streets if some-

thing isn't done. And you sit here and brush your hair with silver brushes. Do you know what ruin means? Do you know what cold and hunger are and the shame of rags?"

"I have known, thanks to you. I shall know again if I trust to you."

It seemed from their glances as if this man and woman had reached the last extremity of hate and distress; and yet to the man at least separation did not suggest itself with any promise of relief. His wife's dislike and contempt goaded him to fury, but there was no one else in the world who could help him — and he had no idea of helping himself.

"If you sold your pearls it would be something," he said sullenly.

"I am not going to sell my pearls yet," she said. "When I do I shall keep the money. I shall not throw it out of the window — or give it to you. Will you be good enough to go now? It is two o'clock, and I have a long day before me."

"What have you to do?"

"I take Miss Ferrers to Paillard's to lunch with Mr. Sheringham. We are to do something absurd in the afternoon, something with a steamboat and the Jardin des Plantes, I believe. We shall be together all day, and in the evening the gentlemen will probably dine here."

"Together — all — day," said M. Varasdin with a quiver in his voice, and he went quietly out of the

room. His wife listened to his step in the corridor and heard him shut his door and lock it. Then she went to bed herself and was soon asleep.

Next day she took great pains with her toilet, but she found when she arrived at Paillard's that it was trouble thrown away. Mr. Sheringham only had eyes for Amabel, who wore a white serge coat and skirt made by an English tailor, and a white sailor hat. He had invited Mr. Newby to make a fourth, and even he looked again and again at Amabel, and said, in an undertone to Mme. Varasdin, that if ever you did see a really pretty girl in Paris you only had to hear her speak to discover she was English or American.

"It is an acquired taste," said Anastasie. "Over here we don't admire your solid red-faced dairymaids. Our beauties have grace and delicacy and charm."

Mr. Newby replied with one of those little grunts that are the inexpressive Englishman's favourite form of dissent. He perceived that Amabel's cheeks were not red, nor was her figure solid, but it did not seem worth while to say so to Mme. Varasdin. He began to talk about oysters instead. After lunch they took two little open carriages and drove to the Jardin des Plantes.

"We will come back by steamboat," said Mr. Sheringham to Amabel when they had started. "We have the whole afternoon and evening before us. I am

going to dine with you too ; Mme. Varasdin has asked me. It sounds ungrateful, but I don't like Mme. Varasdin or her husband either. I have accepted because I want to see you and see how the land lies. I am not sure yet whether I shall have to go back early or late to-morrow. Why don't you come back too? "

" Oh! why should I? " said Amabel. " Uncle Michael expects to find me in Paris. We are going to set up house together in New York."

" That sort of plan doesn't always come off," said Mr. Sheringham.

" It's a very pleasant plan."

" I can imagine a still pleasanter one," said Mr. Sheringham.

Amabel did not ask him to describe it. His voice, his eyes, his manner were all eloquent of the desire in his heart; and in a man's way, without actual confession, he had been telling her ever since they met that he loved her. Her thoughts were not fixed on the city and its sights, and when they got out of the carriage at the Jardin des Plantes she was happy and preoccupied and perhaps not very wide awake. At any rate Mme. Varasdin's voice and touch, a few minutes later, seemed to rouse her out of a dream.

" The gentlemen have gone off to speak to one of the keepers," she said. " It seems that we ought to have had some sort of passes of admission. I wish you would lend me your purse a moment. I have

forgotten to bring any money, and I want to go to that stall and buy some cakes for the elephants."

Amabel's eyes were on a perambulating Polar bear, deep down below her. Without looking at Mme. Varasdin she gave her the little beaded purse-bag she was carrying in her hand.

"Shall I come with you?" she said absently.

"No," said Mme. Varasdin. "The gentlemen expect to find us here. I will be back in a moment."

IX

MADAME VARASDIN had never attempted a theft requiring so much skill and effrontery. She had to extract the certificate of the shares without being seen by the woman who sold cakes or by any chance passer-by; and, of course, when the robbery was discovered she would have to take the line that Amabel was careless, had left her purse here and there, and had probably lost her property out of doors. She knew where to hide the slip of paper while the storm burst, and had, in fact, spent some minutes that morning over the lining of an old winter jacket that usually lay with other rubbish at the bottom of a trunk, in a lumber room at the top of the house.

Her past life contained many episodes that prepared her in some degree for the present hour. She had stolen pence at school. She was the child of shifty, thriftless parents, and her married life had always been unstable. For Amabel she had no pity, but only an envious grudge of her youth and her smiling fortunes; and she would have defrauded the girl of her last penny and her last chance without a pang. She had no room in her mind for any needs except her own, and no heart for any one else's troubles. She would very much rather have had a rich husband

than a poor one who drove her to run risks. But money she must have. She could not work; she could not deny herself; she was dainty, delicate, and selfish; one of those who cumber the earth and behave as if the earth and everything in it were made for them.

She opened the bag as she stood at the stall, and saw that it contained an inner pocket with a separate clasp; and when she undid the clasp she saw that the certificate was wedged tightly inside. It was a thick paper, folded several times, and yet rather too long for the width of the bag. There was a handkerchief in the purse too, and Mme. Varasdin took that out and held it over the open pocket while she apparently felt for change for the cakes, and really tugged at the certificate. To find it, to hold it in her hands, and then to discover that it was jammed, was a bit of the devil's luck she had not bargained for. The woman who had sold her the cakes had wrapped them up, and waited patiently for payment. Mme. Varasdin turned away from her, stooped a little over the purse as if to look more carefully for the coins she wanted, and by dint of stretching the inner bag violently apart, at last got out the paper she wanted. Her hand closed over it, but could not quite conceal it. She hurriedly took some silver coins from the purse, kept the handkerchief covering the shares for the moment, and turned towards the stall again to pay for her cakes. She meant to hide the certificate in an inside pocket of her tailor-made coat as she walked away, but she did

not mean to let the stallkeeper see her doing this. What she had done, so far, had been done in a moment and unobserved, and the thought flamed within her that, by her own dexterity, she held a fortune between her fingers, a fortune that, a minute later, would be her own. She put the silver on the stall, took up the cakes and some copper change and, as she did so, heard the creak of footsteps behind her, and then Mr. Newby's voice in her ears.

"Buying nuts for the monkeys, Madame Varasdin?" said he, and wondered why the lady started violently and afterwards neither spoke nor moved. She stood there like a creature petrified, conscious all the while that Sheringham stood there too, and that the handkerchief and the folded paper it did not wholly conceal were still in her right hand. The sudden fall from success to utter failure confounded and enraged her, but she did not lose her head. She recognised that for the moment it was failure. When she had recovered sufficiently she put the coppers, the handkerchief, and the certificate all together into the gaping mouth of the bag. Then she shut it with a snap, and showed Mr. Newby a smiling face as she gave him her parcel of cakes to carry.

"Where did you get your purse?" he said, with his eyes on the bead-bag. "It is exactly like one I helped Miss Ferrers choose in the Avenue de l'Opéra last week, and the man vowed he had not another."

"It is Miss Ferrers' purse," said Mme. Varasdin.

"I borrowed it just now to buy the cakes. I had forgotten my own."

"She wanted a big one because she carries those shares about with her that her uncle gave her," continued Mr. Newby. "I stuffed them into the inside pocket for her, and I told her at the time she would never get them out unless she tore the purse; but she won't want to get them out till he tells her to sell, and then the price of the purse won't matter. What are Eugenias doing to-day, Sheringham? That strike had much effect yet?"

"Sent them up to three already," said Mr. Sheringham.

"Wish I had a few," said Mr. Newby.

Mr. Sheringham did not show much interest in the sensational rise of Eugenias. He was watching Mme. Varasdin. He had seen her start when they came up to her; he had seen the paper and the handkerchief in her hand, and he had seen her return both to the bag. His curiosity was aroused, and he made up his mind to ask Amabel whether she had taken the certificate out of the inside pocket of the purse, and whether the purse was torn. Madame Varasdin, however, forestalled him.

"But there is a thick-folded paper in the purse," she said. "I got it out with the handkerchief just now when I wanted some small coins. It was not in the inside pocket."

"Bai Jove," said Mr. Newby, "Miss Ferrers must

have been playing with her Eugenias. Isn't the purse torn?"

Madame Varasdin just undid the clasp and snapped it to again.

"I think it is, a little," she said. "But I hate opening any one else's purse, don't you? It makes one feel as if one was reading a letter meant for somebody else."

"I never tried that," said Mr. Newby lightly.

"I wonder why Miss Ferrers carries these shares about with her in this way," said Sheringham. "A purse is easily lost."

"Of course it is," said Mme. Varasdin. "Miss Ferrers is most careless. I have often seen this one lying about. We have honest servants just at present, I believe, but my cook is leaving ——"

"I don't think servants would steal shares," said Mr. Newby.

"She might drop them anywhere — in a shop when she takes them out with her handkerchief — as I did just now. I have begged her to be more careful, but she pays no attention to me. She sees that Hyacinth carries papers of importance in his pocket-book, and I suppose she thinks it is a safe thing to do."

"She usually wears this purse hanging from her waistband," said Mr. Newby. "That's safe enough — if she had left the certificate where I put it. I wonder why she was carrying the bag loose to-day?"

"Because she is wearing a blouse that does not

admit of a waistband," explained Mme. Varasdin. "You should have chosen a purse with a chatelaine hook. That can be worn with anything."

"We thought a ring safer than a hook," said Mr. Newby.

While they talked they approached the bear-pit again, and Amabel saw them and came their way.

"But you have not bought many cakes," she said, with a disappointed air, when she saw the little parcel in Mr. Newby's hand.

"Madame Varasdin is responsible," said he. "We met at the cake-stall."

"Come and get some more," said Sheringham, addressing Amabel.

"Yes," said Mme. Varasdin; "let us all go and buy some more and give the poor animals a feast. I adore animals. They are greedy and suspicious without being ashamed of it. We are just as bad as they are really, but we make greater pretensions—the morality of men lies chiefly on their lips."

"Suspicion is not always a vice," said Sheringham.

"It is always an unamiable trait," said Mme. Varasdin.

"Then how would you catch your criminals?" asked Mr. Newby.

"There would be no criminals if society were less corrupt," said Mme. Varasdin.

"Meanwhile, a police force is useful," said Sheringham; and then they arrived at the stall and he bought

more cakes and paid for them. As they went away from it again, Madame Varasdin returned Amabel's purse.

"Don't let me forget that I owe you a franc," she said.

As a matter of fact, she owed Amabel a good deal. The seven guineas a week the girl paid regularly for board and lodging did not pay all the expenses of the flat, and it was a long time since Hyacinth Louis had had a balance at the bank. Madame Varasdin often borrowed money from her guest, and hitherto Amabel had lent it without protest. Money had come into her hands so suddenly and unexpectedly that for the time being she had grown careless and let it slip anyhow through her fingers. But she was beginning to see that loans to her present host and hostess were like water poured through a sieve. She wished her uncle would come back and put an end to the connection for her, and she often wished she had never occupied the room with the crimson satin chairs. The Varasdins were, of course, as civil as self-interest demanded, and the food was good and the flat in a pleasant quarter; but all these advantages did not make up for a sense of insecurity that she could not shake off. Only this morning, something had happened to heighten it.

Any one who has to do with continental servants knows, of course, that they are not as determined as British servants to treat the relationship between employer and employed from a purely business point of

view. They are inclined to be friendly and loquacious, to take your interest in their affairs for granted, and if they like you or admire you, to say so without beating about the bush. Before Amabel had been a week in the Avenue Ernani she knew that the Alsatian cook supported an aged mother, and that she was engaged to a railway-guard who had a hot temper but a good heart; and that Adèle, the *femme-de-chambre*, had been very unlucky in her situations, and had remarked the day Amabel arrived that mademoiselle had a sweet nature and would, doubtless, be easy to please. The cook used to bring Amabel a little bunch of flowers every day, and the *femme-de-chambre* used to help her to dress, and both girls would have gossiped about the Varasdins if Amabel had not stopped them from the first. But this morning the cook had come to her in a state of angry excitement and poured forth her tale. Amabel did not find angry Alsatian-French easy to follow, but she made out that the cook was leaving for Alsace to-morrow because her mother was ill, and that she could not get her wages out of the Varasdins. Bandits she called them, among other things, and in a voluble patois she advised Amabel not to remain with such people. When Amabel gave her enough money for her journey, she shed tears and kissed the girl's hand, and implored her to leave the house.

"It is not a house for you," she said plainly; and Adèle, who was present, nodded mysteriously, and

said that she herself did not mean to stay much longer, whether she got paid or not.

“Some day it will be ph—tt!” she said, and her dramatic gesture described an explosion and the wreck it leaves behind.

Amabel’s growing uneasiness was not set at rest by these remarks, but it did not occur to her that there was any need for hurry. Financial difficulties do not, as a rule, drive you out of the house at an hour’s notice, like an infectious disease. She resolved, however, to talk to Mr. Sheringham about the choice before her of finding different quarters in Paris and returning to England. He was not an old, tried friend, but she had made up her mind that he was a friend, and that the wide world did not hold his match in kindness, strength, and wisdom. In her own mind she likened him to the golden Sigurd, whose eyes were so awful to his enemies and so kind to children, to the poor, and to the women who loved him; and as she walked round the elephant-house with the astute financier she tried to fancy what he would look like in a helmet and armour of gold. She thought they would become him, and puzzled him considerably by showing a sudden, ardent, and irrelevant interest in the fancy balls he had attended and the costumes he had chosen.

“I went as a clown once, when I was about eighteen,” he remembered with some difficulty.

“Oh!” said Amabel, profoundly shocked. “How unsuitable!”

"I wonder you think so," said Mr. Sheringham.
"You must have forgotten our first meeting."

That was so far from the truth that Amabel coloured and did not speak. They were standing in front of an engaging giant elephant with an appetite for cakes. They had been standing there for some time. Madame Varasdin and Mr. Newby had disappeared.

"Do you remember our first meeting?" said Mr. Sheringham.

"It was on Florrie Hunter's birthday, when she had a children's party."

"It was in the dining-room. Miss Hunter invited me to pull a cracker — a very stiff one — I gave a sort of backward jerk over it, and nearly upset some one behind me who had a dish in her hands."

"You did upset the custards. Mrs. Hunter called me clumsy and apologised to you."

"You cried."

"No, never!"

"I swear I saw tears in your eyes."

"That's not crying."

"And all the rest of the evening I tried to get near you ——"

"Yes," said Amabel, with a reminiscent sigh; "I know you did."

"You suddenly disappeared."

"Mrs. Hunter told me to go upstairs and stay there."

"Did you cry when you were upstairs?"

"The elephant is asking for another cake," said Amabel. "Let us talk about elephants and not about tears. If I did cry I am ashamed of it. I wish I had more courage. I wish I was not afraid of people. I suppose if you know your quarrel is just you do not shrink from it. I do; and I hate myself for it."

"How many people are you afraid of, and how many quarrels have you on your hands?" asked Mr. Sheringham.

"You should have gone as a knight," exclaimed Amabel, who was watching his eyes, and she laughed at his momentary want of comprehension. "Where are the others?" she said.

"But you don't answer my question," said he.

They walked right round the elephant-house, and did not see the others. Then they went out into the gardens and did not find them there.

"I know what has happened," said Amabel. "Madame Varasdin has driven home. She told me nothing would induce her to travel on a penny steamboat; and I saw her shudder and open a smelling-bottle when we went into the elephant-house. I suppose she thought that, as you were to dine with her, you would not mind escorting me home. You know, M. Varasdin does not dress for dinner."

"But we need not go yet," said Mr. Sheringham, looking at his watch. "You said you wanted to see all the animals."

"How is it you have time? I thought people like

you and Uncle Michael never had time for anything but business."

"Is your uncle married?"

"No," said Amabel, thinking that her companion was irrelevant now. "He told me he had never had time to think about it."

"I should have said the same three months ago," observed Mr. Sheringham.

"What happened three months ago?" asked Amabel.

"We've been over all that," said Mr. Sheringham. "There was a children's party — and a stiff cracker — and upset custards — and an angry lady ——"

"Oh!" said Amabel.

X

It was after five when they strolled through the gardens to the Quai d'Austerlitz and took the first steamboat that went their way. Amabel thought it was a pleasant way of seeing Paris. She sat on the clean, half-empty boat with Mr. Sheringham, and steamed smoothly under the bridges of the city past the spires of many churches and the façades of many splendid buildings, in sight of the city traffic and sometimes in hearing of the city wheels. Evening lights set the city and the sky afire, and a summer breeze blew up the river from seawards and met them freshly. Mr. Sheringham had led Amabel to a seat in the bows, which they had to themselves. It was a little way below the main-deck, and they were almost out of sight of other passengers and quite out of hearing. Amabel looked at the clouds and thought her own fate was as suddenly and rosily aglow as they were. She looked at the man beside her, and wondered where his eyes had been these many years, and why she out of all the women in the world should please him. She tried to discover his qualities, and she entered with wonder into the lover's land where mortals walk as gods.

It was a happy hour for both of them. Mr. Shering-

ham had been too hard at work all his life to fritter and diffuse his affections, and he had fallen in love, as a healthy-minded man often does, with the most ardent belief and delight. His subtlety was all financial; in the human relations of life he showed himself simple and kind. "Here by God's grace is the one maid for me," says Geraint, the first time he sets eyes on Enid, and the same thought had flashed across Sheringham's mind when he turned in a hurry and saw Amabel's scared face and the custard streaming absurdly down the worst and meanest dress in the room. Now she sat beside him fine and radiant as a lily. Without his aid Fortune had turned her wheel. But the change that meant so much to her hardly engaged his thoughts. Poor or rich, she was the one maid for him. He talked to her about his home and his people, and she told him about the loneliness and the poverty she had passed through. When words failed them, they watched the city and the sky.

"I wish I had more courage," said Amabel suddenly. "There is a disagreeable thing I ought to do, and I believe I shall just go on from day to day not doing it — unless something happens to make it easier."

"Is it a *very* disagreeable thing?" asked Sheringham.

"I want to get away from the Varas dins."

"I am glad to hear it. I don't like either of them."

Masculine approval is always bracing and pleasant to the feminine mind, especially when the encouraging

man happens also to be the only man in the world of any importance.

"It is so difficult to tell Madame Varasdin," Amabel went on. "Besides it does seem unkind to leave them just when my money is so necessary to them. If M. Varasdin began to prosper again, I should not hesitate. You know about business matters, Mr. Sheringham. Is he ever likely to get on?"

"You can never say with a man like that."

"Couldn't you put him in the way of things?"

"I would rather not have any dealings with him."

"Well — I hope Uncle Michael will soon come back. I am glad you are not operating against him, as he thought. I wrote to him this morning and told him you had lost a hundred thousand over Eugenias, and that you were very pleased for his sake to hear about the new reef."

"Oh! Did you?" said Sheringham.

"Yes," said Amabel. "And I asked him to send you a few shares if they went up — instead of those you sold so badly, you know."

"I don't think you can expect him to do that," said Sheringham, taken aback. "It isn't usual."

"I am sure Uncle Michael would like to," continued Amabel. "He seemed to be wrapped up in Eugenias, and it would vex him to think any one lost over them, especially any friend of ours. He carries them about in his pocket like love letters. He gave me a thousand. I'll show them to you."

“Yes, do,” said Mr. Sheringham, and he watched her open the bag. She looked as much taken aback as he expected.

“How very odd,” she said. “Some one has wrenched them out of the inner pocket, and they were in so tight — the lining is all torn and the frame twisted ——”

She turned the contents of the bag into her lap and examined it. Meanwhile Mr. Sheringham looked at the certificate of the shares.

“It must have been Madame Varasdin when I lent her the purse,” she went on. “She has always been rather keen about Eugenias and angry with her husband because he had none. I suppose she wanted to look at them. But how vexatious it is. I only bought this bag a week ago, and it cost fifty francs. Such things are so dear in Paris. I’ll never lend it to Madame Varasdin again. Do you think it can be mended?”

“I daresay. But why don’t you sell your shares and invest the money — not directly perhaps, but when they go higher still? And you should keep them in a safe place. You know they are bearer shares. If they were stolen you would probably never recover them.”

“Stolen!” said Amabel; and he saw that he had frightened her and he repented of it. He cared very little whether she came to him with a thousand Eugénias in her hand or with never a penny. The important thing was that she should come.

"Oh, well!" he said, "I can't see why you should carry them about."

"Uncle Michael told me to keep them till he wired and then to sell them at once. But he was in such a hurry, he never told me where to sell them — at least he said something about a respectable stockbroker — somehow I don't like the idea of M. Varasdin."

"I'm a stockbroker, you know," said Sheringham.

"Oh, thank you!" said Amabel. "Then the moment Uncle Michael wires, I'll post this paper to you."

"You may do that," said Sheringham, "but you should also wire your uncle's instructions. Then I shall know what to do."

He wished she could give the certificate into his charge at once; but just then the collector came round for fares, and when he had gone again Amabel put her loose money and her Eugenias back into the bag. She called Mr. Sheringham's attention to the bridge they were approaching — their talk shifted, and the opportunity passed by. His suspicions were so vague, and his uneasiness so undetermined, that he was inclined to wait rather than to alarm her seriously. He had seen the shares in Madame Varasdin's hands, but the very audacity of her attempt baffled him. Amabel would have missed the shares by this time; she must have raised a hue-and-cry; what would the lady who borrowed the purse have said in her own defence? Sheringham saw with a flash how little she would

need to say as long as the shares were not found in her possession or their sale traced to her.

"I hope you will soon come back to England," he said to Amabel; and that was all the outcome just at present of his train of thought.

When they got back to the flat, Madame Varasdin sat on the balcony in a poppy-red gown. She had twisted Mr. Newby's pearls round her throat, and she wore other pearls in her hair, and for the time being she had got rid of Mr. Newby. She entertained Sheringham while Amabel changed her gown, and when the girl came back it seemed as if the witch had bewitched him. Anyhow, until the other men arrived, she held his attention, paid him brazen court, and let Amabel sit silent and neglected. The girl, unversed in the ways of men, was puzzled by his temporary capture; and, after dinner, when Madame Varasdin went back to her seat on the balcony and invited the three men to follow her, Amabel stayed behind in the salon. She opened the piano, and began to play softly to herself, without music and without lights. Voices and laughter reached her from outside, and, through an open window, she could just see a scarlet sleeve whenever Madame Varasdin lifted her cigarette to her lips. All through dinner the lady had led the talk and turned it, while the men responded and were entertained. With the best will in the world Amabel could not take her part, and by the end of the meal her silence had become a little dejected. Once or twice

Mr. Sheringham had looked across the table at her inquiringly, as if he saw that something was the matter and wondered what; but his hostess always managed to divert his attention. As a friend for Amabel he did not change his opinion of Madame Varasdin, but he began to understand why young gentlemen presented her with pearls. Her way of telling gay French stories in a low voice, and with a serene brow, was just what would make a young gentleman feel that he was really seeing life. At one moment Mr. Newby had been so well amused that he was obliged to giggle. M. Varasdin sat at his own table with the air of a lay figure that smiles whatever face you show it, and smiles without joy or understanding.

While Amabel played, it grew so dark that she could hardly distinguish the notes of the piano, or the furniture in the room; yet her heart gave a leap of hope and delight as she heard some one come slowly towards her. She could just make out that it was Mr. Sheringham. He sat down beside her, while she finished an adagio from a Beethoven Sonata.

"Why do you stay in here by yourself?" he said.

"Don't you like the balcony?"

"Is it pleasanter out there?"

"It might be if you came."

"Very well," said Amabel, and she was shutting the lid of the piano when she felt an arresting touch on her arm.

"There is no hurry now," said Mr. Sheringham.

“Let us stay here. Why were you so silent all through dinner, and why do you sit here alone?”

“What a beautiful dress Madame Varasdin is wearing to-night,” said Amabel. “But I think she should have worn red poppies in her hair — big, wide open ones in a sort of crown. What a clever woman she is, and how well she entertained you all with her talk. I wish I understood French better and could follow everything she says!”

“Oh, is that it?” said Mr. Sheringham. “Do you really believe, because a man looks and laughs and listens — I don’t want to talk to you across a dinner table. I’m past that. Here, by ourselves, in the dark ——”

He stopped short, and stared at the other end of the room, where some one moved swiftly through the darkness and turned on the light.

“We want a little music,” said Mme. Varasdin.

Amabel relinquished her place at the piano without a word. The untimely interruption did not anger her as it did Sheringham. He “had the expression of *Damn* all over him.” The other men came in from the balcony; the maid who had remained brought in a tray with syrup and orangeade, and Mme. Varasdin began to sing. M. Varasdin pressed his sweet drinks on the two Englishmen, and looked rather hurt because they refused them. Amabel took her glass of iced orangeade to the open window, stood there a moment, and then went out on the balcony. She had

not stood there long when Mr. Sheringham joined her.

"We can't talk here," he said, still angry. "Some of them will be on us directly with their syrup and their silly songs. What business has that woman to sing such songs when you are under her roof? But I suppose you don't understand much French."

"I do," said Amabel indignantly. "I took three French prizes at school, and when I go to the Français I can follow quite well if I get the play and read it beforehand. I think French is the most beautiful language there is. I enjoy hearing the great actors as much as I enjoy music. But I can't follow all that variety slang yet. I daresay I shall soon."

"Not if I can help it," thought Sheringham; but he only said that he wanted to talk to Amabel to-morrow afternoon and come to some arrangement that would take her back to England immediately.

"To-morrow is Wednesday," said Amabel. "In the morning we often go to the Avenue des Acacias."

"I have two important appointments in the morning," said Mr. Sheringham. "It would not be fair to other people to give them up. Besides, I particularly want to see you by yourself. It is no use my coming here. Will you be in the Avenue des Acacias at four o'clock?"

"I will if you can promise to be punctual," said Amabel. "I should not like to wait about long by

myself. That part of the Bois is rather deserted in the afternoon."

"If you come at four you shall find me waiting for you — just at this end of the Avenue, you know," promised Mr. Sheringham.

Directly he had gone Amabel went to her own room. As long as the piano was going there was no chance of sleep, but she was too happy to mind that at all. Since her parents died she had been lonely and unloved, and until lately very poor; and now, to-morrow promised what her heart desired. It hardly crossed her mind that her lover was a rich man; when it did, the idea was comfortable, and translated itself into pretty frocks and rooms and the delightful exercise of generosity, and, above all, into an emblem of her lover's qualities. She took pride in his success and power. She fell asleep thinking of him, and was half roused when Mr. Newby departed, slamming the front door. Then the peace of the night came over the flat and she slept profoundly. What woke her she never knew; what time it was she could not tell. But the dawn had not risen, the stars were still blinking in the sky when, without moving or starting, she opened her eyes. Some one had softly turned the handle of the door and was creeping across the room towards the bed.

XI

AMABEL did not stir. She lay facing the open door, her eyes fixed on the dark figure of Mme. Varasdin, who came as softly as a ghost towards the bed. She came straight on without hesitation or stumbling, and yet it seemed to Amabel that she took a long while to cross the parqueted floor on which her bare feet made so little sound. The girl felt horribly afraid and inclined to start, or speak, or scream. The manner of the woman's entry and her cat-like tread were alarming, so was the dim outline of her face, set in resolve and inhuman. Amabel looked at her hands. One held her gown from the floor, one hung at her side, but it was too dark to see whether they were empty. The girl's heart beat wildly in her throat; she felt sick with fright. If she moved, the woman might fly at her, if she lay still, a mere thief might take what she came for and go away. That she came on some sinister errand was proclaimed in her face. Amabel had not drawn her thick curtains, and through the muslin ones the starlight came into the room just breaking the darkness.

As the woman approached the bed Amabel dared not lift her eyelids in case it should be seen that she was not asleep, but she wondered her anxious breath and shivering body did not betray her. She lay as

rigid as she could, but her knees were loosened and her hands were tremulous and cold. She thought she could feel the warmth of Mme. Varasdin's body as she bent over the bed and cautiously slid her hand beneath the pillow; the scent of violets seemed to fill the room. The hand groping under the pillow slowly closed on something and was withdrawn. The next moment Mme. Varasdin was gliding from the bed towards the open door. She made no attempt to close it.

Relief and terror and anger struggled together in Amabel's mind as she lay there indecisive and unhinged. It was not murder the woman was after, then, but theft: the theft of the Eugénias. With a flash Amabel saw the events of the afternoon in their real light, the request for her purse, the removal of the certificate, the arrival at the bear-pit of Mme. Varasdin and the two men, and Mr. Newby's remark that they had met at the cake-stall. Without rhyme or reason, Amabel suddenly found her fear melting fast in her hot indignation. She made no plan, she took no care, but jumped out of bed and hurried barefoot into the adjoining room. Mme. Varasdin stood close to an open window and with her back to Amabel. Her head stooped a little over her hands, but as the girl came up behind her, she raised her right arm and was just about to throw the purse into the road, when Amabel caught her wrist and saved it. Mme. Varasdin's cry of surprise had rage as well as fear in it, and for a

moment Amabel wished she had not followed her. The first look in the woman's eyes was murderous, and her free hand went up towards the girl's throat. Amabel stepped back with a shudder and would have fled if Mme. Varasdin's manner had not undergone a swift, curious change. She allowed the purse and the shares to fall to the ground, pressed her uplifted hands to her temples, and said, in a voice of sleepy bewilderment —

“What has happened? Where am I?”

“You came into my room and stole my purse,” said Amabel. “I suppose that paper you have just dropped is the certificate of my Eugenias.”

She picked it up as she spoke and put it back in her bag, and all the while she stood there she watched Mme. Varasdin in case she should make a sudden spring and wrench it out of her hands. That lady now looked unspeakably sad and surprised. She pressed her hands to her temples again and sank into her chair with a melancholy groan.

“Terrible!” she exclaimed, “terrible!”

“It is disgraceful,” said Amabel.

“I thought I was safe,” said Mme. Varasdin.

“You would have been if I had not happened to wake. Some one in the street would have picked up the purse. I should have had no proof against you.”

“It is a horrible affliction,” said Mme. Varasdin.

“I had no idea that you were subject to it,” said Amabel — “kleptomania.”

"I know nothing about kleptomania. I am not sure that I believe in it. A thief is a thief whatever fine names the medical profession finds for him. I am a somnambulist. As a child I frequently walked in my sleep, and whatever I dreamed I was doing I actually did. One night I walked barefoot through my father's forest in the snow. I was ill for three months after that. Then the malady seemed to leave me, I hoped never to return. I should probably have thrown myself from the balcony if you had not roused me. Otherwise why should I be standing close to the open window? Perhaps you have saved my life."

"I am glad I have saved my Eugenias," said Amabel. The lady's defence was unanswerable at that moment and without further inquiry; and yet it was unconvincing.

"Take my advice and put them in a safer place," said Mme. Varasdin.

"I shall give them to Mr. Sheringham to-morrow," said Amabel. "I wish I had done so to-day when we found they had been moved."

Mme. Varasdin's glance had neither sleep nor bewilderment in it now. Her narrow eyes closed and her mouth was set in dislike as she rose slowly from her chair.

"To-morrow has come," she said. "It must be two o'clock. I am afraid I have curtailed your sleep. But you need not be nervous; I never walk twice in one night."

Amabel went back to her room, tried the bolts of her window and outer door, and managed to push her chest of drawers across the door opening into the salon. She made a great noise, and once when she stopped she heard a step on the other side, so she knew that Mme. Varasdin was listening. When she had barricaded herself, she got into bed again, but found she could not sleep. At every creak she started, and the silence of the streets increased her sense of loneliness and her fear. She feared the return of Mme. Varasdin; she feared husband and wife together. Suppose they made their way in and were determined to do her some horrid harm. Now that the strain was over, her courage ebbed away and she lay with wide open eyes, expectant and terrified. What had happened seemed worse in retrospect than it had been in experience, just as a narrow escape from violent death turns one sick when all danger is gone by. She vowed she would not sleep under that roof another night, or, if she could help it, confront either of the Varasdins again; and amidst the distress and turmoil in her mind there arose the consoling thought of her friend. He would meet her, she would tell him she must get away, and he would help her. Instead of being afraid of the Varasdins as she was, he would assuredly make them afraid of him. "And that is the difference between a man and a woman," thought Amabel with the usual injustice of a woman when she is comparing her love with her sex. Directly it was

light she got up and dressed and opened her window. The fresh air was restoring, and so was the return of life in the street. The first tramcar seemed to bring back the midday world that has no traffic with nightmares; and the people who soon appeared — artisans on their way to work, milkmen, servants, shopkeepers — were all decent folk, who come with dawn and leave night and its deeds behind them. When Amabel saw that the street was really astir again, she began to pack her trunks, as she had made up her mind that she would not come back to the house if she could help it. By the time she had finished, the maid brought her a tray with coffee and bread and butter; and when Amabel gave her a present of money the girl looked round with surprise at the dismantled room and tried to find out what the young lady's plans were. But the young lady was not in a communicative mood, said she was going out for the day, and left a message for madame that she would not return till late in the afternoon. She said nothing about her trunks being packed ready for a journey, and when she had drunk her coffee she slipped out of the front door quietly and quickly, just as if she did not wish to be seen.

Amabel had a good many hours to get through before she could go to the Avenue des Acacias, but she had mapped out the time for herself as well as she could. She went straight to the galleries of the Louvre and spent two hours there, her thoughts perhaps fixed with greater persistence on the events of

the night and the promise of the afternoon than on the masterpieces before her eyes. At one o'clock she went for lunch to a place where the British foregather, and find in the very heart of Paris that respectable and gloomy environment that reminds them of home. She sat next to a chubby curate and opposite a thin grey spinster dressed in shrunken tweeds, a sailor hat, and spectacles. She eat ham and eggs, drank Mugby Junction coffee, and read the Births, Deaths, and Marriages in an old number of the *Times*. When she had been there half-an-hour she felt quite home-sick, and determined to live amongst her countryfolk again.

But though she made the ham and eggs last as long as she could, she had more than two hours to get through before she could take the second step towards her return journey. She had taken a big one when she packed her trunks, and the moment she saw Mr. Sheringham she meant to ask his advice as to the rest. Meanwhile she could think of nothing better to do than to drive to the Salon. There is protection in a crowd, and Amabel got so much stared at that she did not enjoy walking about the streets of Paris alone. She had been to the Salon several times already and knew where to find her favourite pictures; and she had sat down in front of one and was staring at it rather sleepily when, to her surprise, Mr. Newby came up to her. He carried a catalogue in his hand and looked delighted to find a companion.

"I've had enough for to-day," he said. "It's a beastly grind. Let's come into one of those little side-galleries and talk. Wonder who buys these pictures. I wouldn't. Wonder how the fellows who paint them make a living. Just look at that heap of decaying cabbages with a Cupid sitting on top. What's it mean? Who *wants* to see a Cupid sitting on cabbages every day of his life? And look at those demons writhing in hell."

"They are not demons," said Amabel, who had got up and was looking patiently at the picture; "they are musicians in an orchestra. Their faces are blurred. Perhaps if we were not so ignorant we should think it very clever. Don't you know that the French are much better at painting and acting than we are?"

"Oh, I daresay," said Mr. Newby, and the admission did not seem to trouble him. He found a comfortable seat, and began to look at the passers-by through his single eyeglass.

"How the beggars stare," he went on. "If you were my sister, I wouldn't let you knock about Paris by yourself in this way. It's not right."

"But I'm with you now," said Amabel, laughing at the boy's tone, and secretly rather glad he was there. The rooms were full of people of various kinds, and some of the wrong kind stared at the beautiful English girl more than was civil or agreeable.

Mr. Newby drew himself up and, with a further assumption of manliness, said —

"When you've had enough of the pictures I'll take you back to the Avenue Ernani."

"No, you won't," said Amabel; "I'm not going back there yet."

"Where are you going?"

"To meet a friend in the Bois."

Mr. Newby's silence expressed dissatisfaction. He did not maintain it long.

"Is the friend French or English?" he asked.

"What does it matter?" said Amabel.

"It makes all the difference," said Mr. Newby.

"When I was a little girl I was told not to ask questions."

"I was told not to let my small sisters get into mischief."

Amabel's eyes twinkled in a friendly way as she glanced at the young man.

"I'm going to meet Mr. Sheringham," she said.

"Sheringham is an awfully decent sort," said Mr. Newby.

"If he can help me arrange it, I shall return to England to-night."

"Bless me! What has happened? Have you had a row with the Varasdins?"

"I don't like Madame Varasdin," said Amabel.

She was not unwilling to let Mr. Newby know that there could be divergent opinions about the bewitching Anastasie, and it surprised her a good deal to find that he seemed to understand her point of view.

"I like her very much myself," he said; "but I like cognac, and tobacco, and baccarat, and other things I should not consider wholesome for my little sisters. A young gander can digest a great deal that would injure a young goose."

"I daresay he thinks so," said Amabel. "Is Madame Varasdin like cognac and baccarat?"

"She is agreeable and stimulating," said Mr. Newby.

"I should think she is expensive," said Amabel, and then she blushed uncomfortably at her own indiscretion. But it had occurred to her that the gander's pearl necklace must have cost a great deal more than any offerings made by the goose.

"I know I look like an ass," said Mr. Newby; "but I assure you I can take care of myself. Don't you worry about me."

"It isn't my business to worry about you."

"I hope that isn't a hint, because I was just going to give you some excellent advice. You go back to England as quick as you can, and let Sheringham sell your Eugenias at a top-price, and live good and quiet in one of those Christian families till you have an uncle or husband to look after you. What you're doing here in Paris with delightful but peculiar people like the Varasdins, nobody can understand."

"I wish you would come too," said Amabel. "If you were my little brother, I should refuse to leave you behind."

XII

"I WISH you'd let me take you as far as the Bois," said Mr. Newby. "Suppose Sheringham was detained, and he easily might be, you'd find it very unpleasant waiting about by yourself."

Amabel did not think it likely that Mr. Sheringham would disappoint her, but she made no further objection to Mr. Newby's proposal, and they drove to the Bois together and were put down at the Avenue des Acacias.

"I don't see him yet," said Mr. Newby.

"Perhaps we are early," said Amabel, but she looked at her watch and found that it was after four.

The Avenue was not crowded that afternoon. The pathway was almost deserted; the benches were empty; and carriages and motor cars drove by in a broken procession. There had been a little rain and the air was slightly chilly, but the sun shone out amongst windy clouds and dried the seats and sparkled on the glistening trees. Amabel was so tired that she was glad to sit down, and though she told Mr. Newby not to wait, he sat down with her.

"I'll wait till midnight if you like," he said; "I've nothing to do."

"Perhaps there is a telegram at the Avenue Ernani."

“Very likely. It’s the boom, you bet. A man in Mexican Jem’s position isn’t his own master when there’s a boom in his market. If he was — well, he wouldn’t be Mexican Jem. He may be on his way back to London.”

By this time Amabel began to fear that Mr. Sheringham would not come, and the idea appalled her. She had made no plans, she was full of suspicion, and she had counted on him to help her. The thought of him had sustained her courage all through the night and the lagging day; with a thrill in her heart she had come to hear the end of the story he had half told; she had come for his counsel and protection, and had felt sure that he would ask nothing better than to give them. From the moment she escaped from the flat, she had looked to him as a defender. Her disappointment was indistinguishable from her terror, and she felt both anxious and forlorn.

“Is there a boom?” she said flatly.

“There is an almighty boom,” chirruped Mr. Newby. “Isn’t Hyacinth Louis Varasdin agog about it? I thought he dabbled in Mexicans. Those Eugenias of yours now ——”

“Don’t talk of Eugenias,” cried Amabel. “I wish they had gone to smash like an air balloon. They took Uncle Michael away. They bring me nothing but bad luck. I want to be rid of them. Can’t you take them and sell them and give me the money — invest the money for me, I mean?”

"I suppose I could," said Mr. Newby. "So could Sheringham. Why not talk to him about it?"

"I meant to talk to him about it," said Amabel, with a quaver in her voice that she tried hard to control.

"You can write to him."

"I don't know his address."

"You might as well say you don't know the King's address. Stock Exchange, London, of course."

"It isn't of course at all. I don't know anything about your Stock Exchange, and booms, and people. What is Mr. Sheringham? What is Monsieur Varasdin? Why do you shrug your shoulders at one and go on your knees to the other? What's the difference between them?"

"Oh! Lord!!!" gasped Mr. Newby.

"That doesn't tell me."

"One is a *power* and known to be awfully decent, as I said a little while ago; the other — isn't."

"Isn't awfully decent?"

"Rather not," said Mr. Newby. "You have to be jolly well on your guard with Hyacinth Louis, I can tell you."

"Then why do you dine there so often?"

"If it comes to that, why do you?" said Mr. Newby, looking very red and uncomfortable.

"I pay Madame Varasdin seven guineas a week, and, besides that, she owes me a hundred pounds," said Amabel.

Mr. Newby could not deny himself a slight whistle. It was not very loud or very long.

"She said you had never paid her a penny yet," he observed. "She said so yesterday as we drove home together."

Amabel looked at him and drew her own conclusions.

"If the truth were known I suspect we have both paid for our dinners," said she; and then she suddenly made up her mind to tell him what had happened and to hear what he had to say.

"Last night Madame Varasdin came into my room when she thought I was asleep," she began. "She took this purse from under my pillow ——"

Mr. Newby left off tracing designs in the damp gravel with the point of his stick and sat up with a jerk, facing Amabel. The girl finished her story in words as dry as bones; she told him how she had followed Mme. Varasdin, found the Eugénias in her hands, and got them back again, and how she had felt less afraid at the time than she had done ever since.

"But what did she say?" inquired Mr. Newby.

"She said she was a somnambulist, and had been walking in her sleep."

In spite of Amabel's fatigue and disappointment, she could not help laughing at Mr. Newby's expression.

"Oh! draw it mild," he murmured.

"It was equally impossible to contradict or to believe her," said Amabel.

"You must go back to England," said Mr. Newby, with decision.

"I'm very glad I met you," said Amabel. "If I had come here quite alone and Mr. Sheringham had failed me, I should have been at my wits' end. I can't go to England without my trunks, and I should have been afraid to go back to the flat by myself. I am sure Madame Varasdin will be furious when she finds I will not stay there any longer. I suppose I must stay one more night."

"Must you?" said Mr. Newby doubtfully.

"I would rather travel by day; and I am not afraid, because I shall get Adèle, the *femme-de-chambre*, to sleep in the room, and I shall barricade that door again. I feel sure that she will not make the attempt a second time. She must recognise that she has failed."

"I suppose it is not you who were dreaming?" said Mr. Newby. "You are quite certain about it?"

"Yes," said Amabel; and her tone carried conviction.

"I'm expecting you all to dine with me to-night," said Mr. Newby. "I arranged it with Madame Varasdin yesterday. I've found a new restaurant somewhere towards Montmartre that isn't half bad. I suppose, as it is arranged, it must stand, and perhaps it will be pleasanter for you. Otherwise ——"

Amabel perceived that the young man believed her, and that he was both shocked and angry. She foresaw that Mme. Varasdin's hold on him would not be

as tight as it had been, and that, to this extent at any rate, good was growing out of evil.

"It is past five already," she said. "I think I will go back now and see if there is a telegram."

"I will come with you," said Mr. Newby.

"Then I will tell Madame Varasdin at once, while you are there, that I am going to England to-morrow. When I have done that the worst will be over. I need hardly see her or speak to her again except at dinner, when you will be there too."

"All right," said Mr. Newby. The programme was an uncomfortable one, but he did not know how to amend it. Of course, he must see Amabel through as well as he could, because she was his countrywoman and, for the moment, friendless. It was most unlucky that Sheringham had not turned up. Sheringham had never paid for the Varasdin dinners or presented Mme. Varasdin with pearls, and his companionship of Amabel could not have been regarded by his hostess as a slur on herself. Mr. Newby was not unwilling to wind up his affairs with the lady; her demands had been excessive lately, and her recent exploit put her beyond the pale of his large tolerance; but he would rather have retired quietly and gradually from the little band of her admirers. As things were, he expected an explosion.

She surprised them both by opening the door of the flat herself, but she gave no reason for doing so, and they followed her into the salon. Amabel felt shy of

looking her in the face at first, but she soon found that her embarrassment was not shared by Mme. Varasdin.

"You have missed Mr. Sheringham," she said to the girl, and there was a note of malicious satisfaction in her voice. "He came quite early this morning, and seemed surprised not to find you here."

"Oh!" cried Amabel, and in her voice there was bitter disappointment.

"He waited some time, as I said I did not know where you had gone or when you would be back. Perhaps it struck him, mademoiselle, that you do not treat your hostess very civilly."

"I sent you a message by Adèle," said Amabel.

"I did not receive it."

"I suppose Mr. Sheringham left some message?"

"Oh! the usual thing; his kind regards. He was off to London by the 11.50 train."

"Did he say anything had happened to call him back so suddenly?"

"He talked of business matters to Monsieur Varasdin. I paid no attention."

Amabel saw that Mme. Varasdin did not mean to tell her more than she could help about Mr. Sheringham's visit, and that it was waste of time to ply her with questions. She felt sick with vexation and disappointment, and it was hard to believe that anything pleasant waited beyond the immediate miserable hour. Mr. Newby stood awkwardly beside a group of palms and

fiddled with their leaves. For a little while none of the three people spoke.

"He will be over here again in about a fortnight," said Mme. Varasdin, after some reflection.

Amabel saw her opening.

"I shall not be here then," she said firmly.

"What do you mean?" said Mme. Varasdin.

Mr. Newby took a step away from the palms, a step towards Amabel. Its significance was not lost on Anastasie, and she included him in her glance of anger and dislike.

"I have decided to go back to London," said Amabel.

"But your uncle expects to find you here."

"I shall communicate with him."

"That will take time."

"No," said Amabel. "I shall telegraph to him from London to-morrow. He left me quite free."

"To-morrow!" exclaimed Mme. Varasdin. "You have been under my care six weeks — when I took you into my house, you were somewhat puzzled and friendless, I think — out of my compassion I threw open my doors to you. My husband and I have treated you as an honoured guest, and without rhyme or reason you want to leave us at a day's notice as you leave an inn. Allow me to inform you, Mademoiselle, that your behaviour is not becoming, it is not even honest. I have been put to considerable expense on your account. How do you propose to compensate me?"

"You owe me a hundred pounds," began Amabel,

in so low a voice that it hardly reached Mr. Newby's ears ; but Mme. Varasdin turned and spoke to him.

"Mademoiselle is assuredly a dreamer of dreams," she said, and her hand went to her head for an instant as if to intimate that there was something a little wrong with the girl's mental faculties. "I do not owe her a penny."

For a moment Mr. Newby hesitated ; but one glance at Amabel's sane, indignant, and contemptuous face convinced him.

"Miss Ferrers is free to go to-morrow if she chooses, you know," he said. "What's the good of making a bother about it? She's homesick, and you can't keep her here by force. As for the money transactions that have taken place between you ——"

"I am not going to discuss them with you," said Mme. Varasdin resolutely.

"There is nothing to discuss," said Amabel, getting up. "I shall go to London to-morrow, and I make you a present of a hundred pounds."

She went straight to her own room and rang for Adèle, but no one answered. When she had rung twice she went to the kitchen and then into every room on the flat except the salon. But Adèle was nowhere to be found. As she stood indecisively in the hall, wondering if the girl had been sent out and would soon return, the front door bell rang. She opened the door herself, saw the concierge with a letter in his hand, and observed that Adèle was not at home.

"Does Mademoiselle not know?" said the man. "Adèle was dismissed this morning — paid her wages and dismissed. She was so surprised, she hardly knew whether to laugh or cry."

"But why was she dismissed?" said Amabel, and the man was astonished to see her turn quite pale and weak. She clung to the door and her voice shook when she spoke. He shrugged his shoulders at her question and pointed inside the flat.

"Ladies like madame are violent and capricious," said he. "I believe the poor girl broke a vase. What surprised her was to get paid. She thought she would have to go to the police for her money."

Mr. Newby had just got up to go when Amabel entered the room again, looking so white and scared that he took alarm.

"What is it?" he said.

"I'll go to-night," she whispered. "Adèle has been sent away. I'm afraid to sleep here again. I'll go to-night."

XIII

MR. NEWBY looked uncomfortably at Mme. Varasdin. She had come up to them and must have heard what Amabel said.

“What is the matter now?” she inquired.

But that was more than Amabel had courage to tell her just then. She stood in the doorway, the picture of agitation and alarm, and she turned her eyes to Mr. Newby with an appeal in them that the young man would have responded to at any cost to himself.

“Don’t you worry,” he said obscurely. “I’ll fix things and let you know at dinner. I’m off now. See you again at seven sharp.”

“Where?” asked Amabel, who had never before troubled about the name or address of a restaurant at which she was to dine with the Varasdins. He told her and she listened carefully, and then before he had time to make a move, she ran into her own room. They heard the key turn in the lock.

“I’m afraid I frightened the poor girl last night,” said Mme. Varasdin, narrowly watching the young Englishman’s face. “She seems quite nervous and upset. Instead of going out to dinner, she ought to see a doctor and take a soothing draught. Can’t you persuade her to?”

"I'm afraid not," said Mr. Newby. "She does seem a bit upset. You see she has got it into her head that it might happen again."

"She did tell you about it, then! How unnecessary and disloyal to gossip with a stranger about the infirmity of a friend. I am disappointed in Miss Ferrers."

"Well! you've almost seen the last of her."

"I suppose she means to return here to-night?"

"Oh! didn't you hear what she said to me? She prefers to sleep in Paris to-night, so as to be nearer the Nord for her start, I suppose. It is quite a good idea."

"I don't agree with you. This young lady is staying in my house. Her uncle put her in my care. At a moment's notice, without apology or explanation, she decamps, abetted by you. What do you suppose her uncle will say and her English friends? What are your intentions with regard to her?"

"My intention is to have dinner with you and your husband and Miss Ferrers, and then to take you to some of those Montmartre theatres, as we arranged last night. That's all at present," said Mr. Newby, and he walked away. The lady made no effort to detain him. She waited until she heard her husband's step in the corridor, and then she went out to meet him. He took a long time to hang up his hat and coat, and then he strolled towards her as if there was no hurry. He did not observe that her face was livid with anger and impatience.

"Come into my room," she said.

Her room was at the further end of the flat, and the only available door faced the long, narrow passage. As M. Varasdin was about to shut it, his wife pulled it roughly from him and set it wide ajar.

"I want no listeners," said she.

"Are the servants about? I don't hear them."

"I want no servants," said Mme. Varasdin. "The cook went yesterday, I sent off Adèle to-day."

"What for?"

"So that we should be by ourselves — with Miss Ferrers. Is that plain enough, fool?"

The man shuffled uncomfortably in his chair. He had sat down in the easiest at once and had yawned and stretched his legs, but now he looked up at his wife who seemed suddenly to be standing over him, her face and her whole body tense with anger.

"You are pleased to yawn and stretch your legs," she said; "I suppose you think there is nothing else for you to do to-night."

"I hope there is dinner," he said, with artificial gaiety.

"It is your one thought. And pray what have you brought me of late to buy dinner with?"

"I can't bring you what I haven't got," said the man, his flaccid face overcast and scowling. "I'm cleared out. I had to borrow a few francs from Gregorio to-day to pay my *déjeuner* and my tram fares. You'll have to give me something for to-morrow."

"I have nothing to give. I am not going to sell my

jewels to support a scamp like you. I owe Miss Ferrers a hundred pounds."

"Those Eugénias would set us right. They are at four to-day and will go much higher when confirmation of the strike comes. We could buy a little villa somewhere on the Riviera and there would be an end to this dog's life ——"

"Some dogs earn a living," said Mme. Varasdin. "They are harnessed in carts and work hard. Some lie on cushions and eat and sleep and grow fat. Which kind of dog are you, my friend?"

"Oh! your tongue!" said the man. "Get the Eugénias, and then talk if you please."

"It isn't so easy. I've tried twice and failed. Your turn comes now. You have the evening before you."

"The evening!"

"Mademoiselle has taken fright. She does not like a somnambulist. She sleeps at a hotel to-night. To-morrow she goes to England."

"*Diable!*" said M. Varasdin. "And you call yourself clever!"

"You must remember that in the matter of criminal offences it is I who am the amateur," said his wife.

"You are the kind of woman one strangles in the end," said he.

"You perceive how we stand, I hope," she continued. "We have nothing but debts, and I should like to know in which capital of Europe you have the shreds of a reputation. Paris was our last chance, and

here too you have burnt your fingers. You are not the man to prosper in a new country. What lies before you unless you get hold of these Eugenias? If you come back to-night without them you have seen the last of me. I am at the end of my patience. Your rascalities land you in prison instead of at the top of the tree, and I have told you before that poverty is not to my taste. I was not made for it."

The man covered as he listened to his wife's tirade, and he muttered again that he had been unlucky and that he couldn't pick up money in the streets, and that their separation would not do either of them any good.

"I'm tired of supporting you," she said; "that's the long and short of it. You haven't earned a sixpence this year."

"You scold and you scold, but you don't tell me what I'm to do," complained M. Varasdin.

"We are dining with Newby to-night. After dinner I am going out with him. You will naturally conduct Miss Ferrers to her hotel. You are not a somnambulist. You have escorted her here and there these six weeks. She can find no reason to refuse."

"She can insist on a cab. It will be a ten minutes' drive."

"Persuade her to walk, then. But I leave the details to you. I admit that the matter has elements of difficulty. At the same time I must remind you of the desperate condition of our own affairs. After all, you are a man. The meanest hound amongst you has the

pull when it comes to muscle. The most beautiful woman in the world, the cleverest woman in the world walks through life knowing that any blackguard can knock her down. It doesn't happen, you say? Look through that pile of old newspapers. If you can find one without a case of it I'll give you twenty francs for your *déjeuner* to-morrow."

M. Varasdin did not search through the papers to which his wife pointed. He was thinking hard.

"Where are we dining, do you say?"

"At that restaurant Newby has just discovered, right away towards Montmartre."

"She knows her way about Paris?"

"She knows how to get from here to the Louvre in a cab or a tram. She knows the Madelaine and the Place de la Concorde. She has stared at Notre-Dame. She has never been near all those quiet old streets you will be near to-night."

"It is impossible. I should be suspected. The police would be on us in a few hours."

"If you bungle. What does suspicion matter so long as proof is impossible? Of course, you must come straight back here, and, according to what has happened, we shall act. Don't run away in a panic and have a hue-and-cry after you before morning. Probably we shall sit still, answer all questions, and snap our fingers in the end. It is either that or the gutter for both of us."

"You are sure of that?"

Mme. Varasdin shrugged her shoulders. A clock in the room struck six. It was time for her to dress, and she took from the wardrobe the quiet, close-fitting gown she considered suitable that night. The man sat staring at the floor, and biting his lips, and sighing hard sometimes. He looked like a stupid, evil beast caught in a trap, and he could see no way out except the one he feared to try. He had led a life of mean shifts; had sat in an Austrian prison as a swindler; and had left an equivocal name in many cities. At the beginning of his career he had shown some skill in playing the devil's game with money; had floated wild-cat companies, and had been known to fools, first as a financier and then as a knave. He had feasted and roystered, and starved and despaired. Over and over again his wife had lifted him out of the mire with money got he asked not how. She was so clever and so prudent that, of late, they had even gained a footing in the semi-respectable society formed by the successful of his kind in Paris, and had led an agreeable life there. He was no worse, he told himself, than other men; no worse than that arch-swindler, Jacob Wolfenstein; not much worse than old Gregorio; a little better, perhaps, than the notorious Whitley Brown, who still sat at good men's tables, whose wife had curtsied to kings. It was his dire misfortune that ruin had him by the throat unless he committed a theft for which want of scruple was not sufficient without pluck and sleight of hand.

Meanwhile, Amabel got ready for dinner and packed what she needed for the night in a small handbag she could, at a pinch, carry. The Eugenias she put into a chatelaine bag that fastened into her waistband by a long, broad hook. She thought they were safer on her body than in either of her trunks. Besides, in half-an-hour she would be done with this household, where sinister deeds seemed real, and not, as they seem to most of us, half fabulous. When she thought of the Varasdins now she thought of events, and words, and glances that all helped, like lights turned up of a sudden, to show their true colours. She remembered their straits for money, their cat-and-dog life, the extravagance of the woman, the idle complaisance of the man. The thought of another night on the flat had become unbearable. With Adèle to keep her company, she might have endured it; by herself she knew she could not. She shuddered at the thought of Mme. Varasdin's hands near her throat again. What she feared the girl could hardly have told you, but sheer physical terror unnerved her, and her one desire was to get away — away from this woman and back to the company of honest men.

When she was ready she listened anxiously at her door and heard no movement anywhere on the flat. She took a sudden resolve, crept softly to the front door, which was near her own, opened it without noise and let herself down in the lift. As she descended she trembled lest she should still by some miracle be

overtaken, yet she stopped for a moment to speak to the concierge, to give him a present of money, and to leave an address for letters. Then she went out into the street, hailed an open cab, and drove to the address Mr. Newby had given her. He was waiting near the door, and he looked surprised to see her arrive alone.

"Aren't the Varasdins coming?" said he.

"Oh yes!" said Amabel. "But I thought I wouldn't wait for them. I wanted to ask you about a hotel."

"I've taken a room for you at the Ritz," said Mr. Newby. "You see they know your uncle there. You'll be all right. I'm sorry I can't see you off to-morrow, but I've promised to show some people round Versailles, and we have to make an early start."

Amabel thanked him, and they went inside the restaurant, sat down at the table he had chosen, and began to talk of indifferent things. She felt relieved and happy and a little excited, as men do when they have faced danger and passed safely by. Her thoughts turned to England and to the circumstances of her new life there, and she told Mr. Newby how few friends she had and how she would not know where to lay her head until she had consulted with Mrs. Pugsley.

"That state of things won't last long," said Mr. Newby sagely. "Money makes friends."

"It makes enemies too," said Amabel rather rue-

fully. "The moment I get to London I shall send these hateful Eugenias to Mr. Sheringham and ask him to get rid of them for me. Uncle Michael told me to wait, but I don't think he'll mind when he hears what a worry they've been, and Mr. Sheringham will know when they ought to be sold, I suppose. Isn't it odd that a musty old bit of paper like this should be worth so much money, that people should covet it, that I should have to guard it as if it was a jewel, and that I can sell it and get real treasures with it — clothes, and books, and music, and journeys, if I choose, to Ultima Thule."

She had taken the certificate out of her bag and unfolded it for Mr. Newby to see, and their heads were bent over it when the swish of a silk gown close by arrested Mr. Newby's attention.

"Put it away," he said under his breath, and got up to receive Monsieur and Madame Varasdin. Amabel hurriedly thrust the paper into the bag at her side and looked up to see whether the husband and wife had observed her. Apparently they were both engrossed in apologising to Mr. Newby for being a quarter of an hour late.

"We waited for mademoiselle," they said, but their manner conveyed no reproach. Indeed, their bland civility almost persuaded Amabel that her own behaviour had been panic-stricken and rude. Nevertheless the thought of sleeping at the Ritz was comfortable.

XIV

THE paraphernalia of common life, the habits of the body, and the company of ordinary men, all combine to give tragedy a distant and improbable air. Yet it takes little faith and less reflection to show that in every tragedy, whether of crime or fate or passion, all parts are played by men whose needs and occupations are as everyday as our own. In real life the most awful events are not detached from the trivial as they are in poetry; our spirits agonise in human bodies with human needs, and the sun shines on sorrow as often as on joy. Nevertheless, so narrow is our vision, so hidebound our intelligence, we find it difficult to see in the mingled yarn the thread of grief or danger that will soon be inextricably woven. Amabel sat at table in a well-lighted, well-appointed Parisian restaurant. The silver and glass were shining, the dishes were dainty, the guests who sat at other tables afforded her entertainment. She drank champagne, and that cheerful wine restored her; she heard Mme. Varasdin and Mr. Newby discuss the various ways of cooking mutton, and that curiously encouraged her. She inhabited a safe, commonplace corner of the world, where people were occupied with their palates and did not contemplate deeds of violence. Her fears

fell from her, she took an interest in the menu, and she addressed herself to her dinner and to M. Varasdin.

Amabel still thought him a mere animated barber's block, and admired him so little that the very phrase, *bel homme*, the phrase his wife used to describe him, had been lowered in its meaning, and she would not have applied it except to cast some slur of hollowness and vanity. This evening, he seemed to be in a silent mood, and he made so little response to Amabel's efforts that she guessed him to be sulky over her departure, and left him alone. Mme. Varasdin took note of this at once, and drew the girl into conversation without any sign of rancour or regret. Her bland face showed no change, her questions expressed her interest in Amabel's plans, and her manner suggested the tolerance with which a healthy person condones the fancies of an invalid.

"Are you going straight to your friends?" she asked. "Do they expect you?"

"I shall telegraph to them to-morrow," said Amabel.

"But you must give me an address for letters," said Mme. Varasdin.

"I have left one with the concierge," said the girl.

The lady then began to talk about London. Unhappily for that city, she had not enjoyed a fortnight she spent there some years ago. It was impossible, she

said, to think much of a nation that eats parboiled cabbage with its dinner every day and sleeps on small oblong pillows. Amabel asked her about theatres and picture-galleries, but she said she had not troubled to visit either, as she had always been told that the English could not act or paint.

"Nor have you any musicians or poets," she added. "It is very strange."

"The wonder is that a nation so compact of evil and stupidity can exist at all," said Mr. Newby, with something rather like a wink at Amabel.

"You are decaying fast," said M. Varasdin solemnly. He was rather flushed, and had emptied his glass oftener than usual.

"I have enjoyed being in Paris," said Amabel; "and to come across French people everywhere is like living in a fairy story where the fountains run with champagne. I like their talk and their smiles, and their quickness, and their kind, pretty ways. But I want to get back to my own country, too. It is only in your own country that you know what other people are thinking. Besides, I am homesick for toast and tea, and the illustrated papers, and a cabman who can drive, and a bobby like a monument. Is it windy to-night? I hardly noticed. Shall I have a smooth crossing?"

"I don't think so," said Mr. Newby; "a wind's getting up."

Then the talk turned on Channel passages and

the Channel tunnel, and from that went wide over the high seas. Mr. Newby had been round the world, and told stories of Japan and China; and Mme. Varasdin asked questions about Indian cities and about the native princes he had met out there, and about their European hangers-on.

“Don’t you know a Rajah who wants a secretary and treasurer?” said she; “a rich Rajah, who would give Hyacinth a salary for managing his finances, and me some big diamonds because I am so charming. I am tired of Europe. I should like to get away into a bigger, wider world.”

Mr. Newby said he did not think a native Indian city would seem very big or very wide after the first three months. He recommended Charing Cross. That suggested a comparison of cities, and it appeared that Mme. Varasdin knew most of the important European ones west of Russia and south of Berlin. Amabel who only knew London and Paris, could not join in this discussion, and she fell to thinking how odd it was that she should sit amicably at table with people she was leaving in such a way and for such a reason. It seemed impossible that both should be real—the woman who crawled and stole in the night, and this cheerful dining-room with the guests and the busy servants, and Mr. Newby, and the well-dressed, easy-mannered woman next to him. But when Amabel looked at M. Varasdin, she felt some return of the vague uneasiness left by the shock she had sustained.

As the dinner proceeded, his face grew more deeply flushed; for once, wine did not loose his tongue, and the man who was usually a big eater and noisy and boastful in his talk, now played with his food, consumed nothing, and sat so brooding and speechless that Mr. Newby at last noticed his unnatural mood.

"What are you hatching, Varasdin?" he said. "Going to make your fortune to-morrow? Laying the plans to-night?"

"He really has that appearance," said his wife; "I hope it is so. Hyacinth, I drink to your success. Lay your plans well to-night. See that they succeed and bring us good fortune to-morrow."

"We'll all join in that toast," said Mr. Newby, and he raised his glass. Of course, Amabel did so too.

"I wish you good luck," she said to M. Varasdin.

She thought he behaved rather badly. He took no notice of her sentiment, he did not look her way; he emptied his glass in such haste that he was near choking over it, and he set it down with such an unsteady hand that he brushed against other glasses and upset them. His wife frowned as she watched him.

"You do not respond to mademoiselle," she observed. "She drinks to your success. Drink with her."

At his wife's bidding, M. Varasdin refilled his glass and sipped from it with a perfunctory bow in Amabel's direction, but his eyes avoided her, and it was to Mr.

Newby, who sat opposite, that he addressed his next remarks.

"All my life I have been dogged by bad luck," he said. "It is little enough that I want of the world, yet I don't seem able to get it. Why does one man succeed and the other fail? Can you teach me the trick? But I suppose you have never earned a sixpence yourself. You took the trouble to be born of a lucky father. You found your bed ready made."

"Oh, luck changes," said his wife lightly. "Yours is on its way, my friend." Then she deftly stopped the lachrymose rejoinder she saw coming by a request for her cloak. It was time to say good-bye and start, she reminded Mr. Newby.

Amabel thought the moment a difficult one. The Varasdins were quite civil although her stampede from their roof was hostile and perhaps ridiculous. Their urbanity put her in the wrong, and though she held to her resolve, she felt apologetic, doubtful, and conciliatory as she offered Mme. Varasdin her hand. The lady just took it and let it drop again. She was occupied with the clasps of her cloak and was evidently not stirred either to compunction or to shame.

"Hyacinth will take you to your hotel," she said.

"It is unnecessary," said Amabel; "I can have a cab."

"Allow me to render you this small service, Mademoiselle," said M. Varasdin, and there was a note

of offence in his tone as if he scented distrust and defied the girl to express it. Amabel, inclined to doubt her own conclusions, gave in at once. They started before the others, and M. Varasdin carried the small dressing-bag she had taken with her for the night. When they got outside M. Varasdin looked at the sky and observed that the rain held off and that if mademoiselle pleased they might walk to the Place Vendôme.

“But you are turning the wrong way,” said Amabel.

“It is a quiet way that I know very well,” said M. Varasdin.

Amabel had little idea of locality, and she had never been on foot in this neighbourhood before. Her companion dived down side streets, took a turn to the left, a turn to the right, and in a few minutes hopelessly confused her. From where they walked now she could not have found her way to the Madeleine or to any other point well known to her. They were in a poorer quarter than she had seen yet, and some of the streets were empty and badly lighted. She kept her eyes open for a cab, but none plied for hire here. She began to wish herself back amongst the busy traffic of the city, where the crowd would have given her a sense of safety. The man beside her hardly opened his mouth, and that was not his wont, and added to her uneasiness. She tried to talk, and her own voice vexed her, it was so artificial. She forgot her fatigue and set a hurried step, and looked

furtively behind when M. Varasdin dropped back a yard or two. She observed that he did this whenever the street was empty, but that when other people were in sight he kept easily abreast. If he had let her lag behind she thought she could have endured a little longer, but it set her nerves on edge to listen for his footfall at her heels and to turn her head and see him close at her shoulder. The ignoble lines in his face, of self-indulgence and ill-humour, were set as if in a mask to-night, and as he hovered near her, still and threatening, she wondered which was the real man, this ruffian or the *bel homme* all volubility and smiles.

They turned now into a long, badly lighted street of tumble-down private houses, and there was not a sound or a sight here to allay Amabel's vague alarm. The very windows were mostly in darkness, the noise of busier streets sounded far away, and there was not a footstep on the pavement except their own.

"I am sure we are wrong," she said, with decision. "When we get to the end of this street I shall take a cab. I have been out all day and am tired."

She spoke because the silence and the deserted street were terrifying. It reassured her to break the silence and to talk as if nothing worse was on her mind than her weary body and this weary trudge. But she made the mistake that a timid person makes when he snatches his hand too suddenly from an uncertain dog and so decides him to spring. M. Varasdin understood that

it was now or never. He fell a step behind again, and she turned her head at once and caught him shifting the bag he carried from the left hand to the right.

At that moment a house door opened and shut again with a bang, and a boy came whistling into the street. He walked ahead of them on the opposite side, and Amabel had it in her mind to run across the road and walk close to him until they reached a more frequented part where there would be a constant stream of people and the chance of a cab. But the boy walked fast, and was fast outstripping them. She hurried her own steps to keep up with him. The man by her side muttered some remonstrance she scarcely heard, and placed himself close to her and on the kerb, so that she must pass behind him or in front of him to cross. The boy's whistle grew a little fainter with every yard they covered, and she had to strain her eyes now to make out his figure. As long as she saw it, as long as she heard him, she thought the chances might still be with her, and she looked for the end of the long street and hoped that her strength and courage would not fail her. For it was not easy to walk steadily forward with a cool head and her heart beating hard against her side. The boy changed his tune, whistled the new one a little louder, and as it seemed to her for a moment slackened his pace. She leapt in front of M. Varasdin, thinking to cross at any hazards, and win to safety. And then she halted on the kerb, stricken helpless with disap-

pointment. The boy had swung open the heavy door of a courtyard, and shut it behind him. She looked despairingly down the narrow street, and saw no one to take his place. M. Varasdin had come close behind her again, and she moved swiftly to one side. But as she did so, she saw his uplifted arm, and before she could escape, before she could guard herself or even scream, the bag he carried came down on her head and shoulder with a smashing blow. She groaned and fell, and lost all consciousness.

In a moment M. Varasdin swooped over her inert body, and unhooked the chatelaine purse from her waistband. The girl lay quite still, and he could not hear her breathe. But he had no courage to make sure that she was dead. His own limbs were so tremulous now, that he kept on his feet with difficulty. He stuffed the purse into his pocket, picked up the travelling bag, got to the other side of the street, and walked quickly and softly to the end of it. He arrived at an open place where other streets converged, and where other people were passing. At one corner there was a café, not well lighted, and as far as the outside seats went, nearly empty. He sat down here and called for a cognac. For the moment he was at the end of his strength, and at the end of his resources. His thoughts were in a flurry. He did not know what to do next, or what would happen if Amabel was dead, or if she rose as a witness against him. He did not know which he desired, to have succeeded as a mur-

derer, or to have bungled this business as he had done many others. He had the Eugenias in his pocket, and took no thought of them. He felt sick and chilly, and offended with fate; but above all offended with his wife who had driven him to do this dangerous thing, and sat safely at home herself. He cursed her for letting him undertake it without money in his pocket. He could not make good his escape until he had gone home and found her, and procured money for his travelling expenses. He ought to have foreseen this, and brought money with him, and be on his way already. It would waste hours to go out to Passy and return to Paris. The police would soon be astir. But Anastasie had said something about flight being unnecessary. He could not remember — did not understand. The waiter might bring another cognac. He was not ill, at least he did not count a touch of ague as illness. The man might bring him a double quantity if he pleased. It was showery to-day, and the damp easily affected him. Also, he had walked far. One franc, twenty? It was well. The waiter could keep the change.

M. Varasdin lifted the glass to his lips and set it down again, because his trembling hand would not hold it. His face was petrified in fear and surprise, and if he had not sat alone in the half darkness of an ill-lighted corner of the café, his condition must inevitably have attracted notice. His eyes were fixed on the pitiful figure of Amabel staggering slowly across the

place, her hand held to her head, her clothes in disorder, her face discoloured with blood. She came straight towards him. He could see her blind and terrified eyes; and he rose hurriedly to his feet with a scream. But his scream was drowned in the shout that went up from every side, and in the puffing noise of a motor car that dashed out of a side street across the Place, and as it seemed, right over the girl. When M. Varasdin came to his senses he saw a crowd gathered where Amabel had stood. The waiter who had served him came away from it and spoke as he passed.

“It is a young lady,” he said; “she is quite dead.”

XV

MADAME VARASDIN was decidedly in a difficult mood. The players did not amuse her, and she left the theatre at the end of the first act. She had no mind for a café, or for a variety show, or for anything else that Mr. Newby proposed.

"I am not very well to-night," she said. "It is an influenza. Get me a cab and don't come near me for two days. I detest seeing my friends when I am ill. There is only one thing I hate more, and that is seeing them when they are ill. Sick people ought to hide."

"But you seemed all right at dinner," said Mr. Newby.

"These things come on very quickly sometimes. Yes, call that driver with the white hat. By the way, shall you see Miss Ferrers again before she starts for England?"

"I'm afraid not. I've promised to be at Versailles all day to-morrow with two Yanks who are staying at my hotel, and we start early. Yanks are so beastly energetic. Had you any message?"

"None at all. Besides, she must fetch or send for her trunks. She was an amiable young person. It is a pity she was subject to unamiable delusions. I hope

she will go to the Ritz to-night and to England to-morrow. But I do not feel sure. She was in an excitable condition. I think she needs great care. I am glad to see that your interest in her is not as deep as I feared. I wish I felt equally safe about Hyacinth. You observed his dejection at dinner. The news of Miss Ferrers' departure cast that gloom over him."

"Much more likely the state of the market," said Mr. Newby. "A boom, when you're not in it, is depressing."

The symptoms of lassitude and fever that had afflicted Mme. Varasdin vanished as the cab turned westwards. She was impatient to be at home. She thought it most likely that Hyacinth's courage had failed him, that he had done nothing at all, and that life would go on as it threatened, leading them in no time to open disgrace and destitution. She had her jewels, but it is not easy to sell jewels profitably when once the police are on your tracks, and when they do not belong to you at all but to your creditors. With a man like her husband, affairs must needs grow worse as time goes on and proves his incapacity and want of faith by a whole known history of questionable transactions. His friends had fallen from him, his credit was gone, his name was rank in the market-place. She could, of course, leave him to his fate. That path lay before her, but without seduction. She knew too much about the career open to an extravagant woman, unclassed, idle,

and in some measure fastidious. The future held one hope, and before midnight she would know whether or not it was fulfilled. Small wonder that her mood was restless, and that she had no mind for the unrealities of the play. Her fate hung on her husband's boldness and discretion, and she knew him to be a coward and a fool.

In the improbable event of his success there was still a difficult question before her, and she saw that she might have to settle it suddenly. He would want to keep the plunder in his own slippery hands; he would play ducks and drakes with it, and a few months hence they would be beggared again. This issue was much in her thoughts as she approached the Avenue Ernani. She looked up at her windows and saw no light there. She paid the cabman, went up in the lift, and opened the door with her latch-key. She looked into every room and found that her husband had not returned. Then she sat down in her own room, and for some time did not stir even to remove her hat and gloves. She had to think and decide. What should she do if he came back having attempted nothing? what should she do if he had tried and failed? Suppose he absconded with the shares and she never saw him again? suppose he brought them back and refused her a share in them? Whatever he did he would act solely for himself, she knew. She hoped nothing of him, hardly wished him otherwise. Most of all she wished him dead and

out of her way. For a long while now she had seen that this solution was the only convenient one; he did no good in the world. No one would miss or bemoan him. He had not won the esteem or the affection of one fellow-creature on his way through life. He was a man without a friend. Unfortunately the law takes no count of quality, and it is as dangerous to rid society of a drone as of a hero. It behoved her to keep out of danger, and she thought she saw a way, a way she would not take, however, unless the need arose. Hyacinth should live if he showed himself amenable; even if he came back with empty hands he should live. Nothing should condemn him short of his own greed.

Mme. Varasdin got up and unlocked her jewel case. She took from it a small bottle with the label of a Vienna chemist. It contained a strong preparation of morphia that had been given her some years ago to relieve pain. She had always kept it, and had sometimes felt tempted to use it and so shuffle off the coil of life. She had never before thought of administering it to any one else. She would not think of it now with any steadiness or decision, but she soaked the bottle in water and removed the label and burnt it. The little bottle she hid in the pouched bodice of her dress. Then she took off her hat and went into the dining-room and turned on the lights. She had just put brandy on the sideboard and soda water and glasses, when she heard a slight sound at

the front door, and then a stealthy step in the hall. As she turned round her husband appeared in the room.

He was trembling with triumph and excitement; yet he looked about him as he came in and she saw that he was afraid.

"I am alone," she said. "What has happened?"

"I have succeeded where you failed," said he.

His wife looked at the bag he carried in his hand.

"I see you have brought that bag here as a witness against you," she observed. "The shares——"

"The shares are in my pocket," he cried, and he put down the bag and took from his coat pocket the purse containing the shares. His wife stood near the sideboard and watched him. She saw him open the purse and she saw the certificate in his hands. He unfolded it, fluttered it towards her, and then put it in his coat again. The purse he left lying on the table.

"Are you safe here even for an hour?" said his wife.

"The poor girl is dead," said the man, with a shudder.

"You would certainly not be safe if she was alive," said Mme. Varasdin.

"You told me I should. You told me to come back. But no one knows I am here. As I came in I gave the name of Duval, the people above us."

“What makes you think the girl is dead? How did you get the shares?”

“How does one get anything one wants? I took them.”

“Was there a scene? A noise? A crowd? How did you get away?”

“Ask such questions of a fool and not of me. I am new to the game, yet I played it with skill. We were in a deserted street—I had this bag in my hands—and I tell you once for all, Anastasie, that I will not speak of what happened. A man of my calibre cannot shrink from a disagreeable necessity, but I suppose a cook who has to wring the neck of a pigeon does not dwell on it afterwards with any pleasure.”

“A cook is not in danger of the guillotine,” said Mme. Varasdin.

“I did not kill the girl myself,” said her husband sulkily.

But the colour had gone from his face, and his voice was harsh and shaky when he began to speak again.

“I left her lying on the pavement.”

“Oh! I guessed that,” interrupted his wife. “You knocked her down, took her purse, and ran away in a fright, the proofs gaping in your hands. Well?”

“I felt dreadfully upset. My knees were loose under me. So I sat down at a café——”

“How far off?”

“Beyond the end of the street. I drank three cognacs before my strength returned. I tell you that

what I have done to-night is not easy to do; and what I saw next was not pleasant to see. The girl came staggering across the Place towards me."

"I thought so."

"If you know what happened I may save myself the trouble of telling you. Perhaps you know what the girl looked like...that she had her hand to her head...that there was blood on her face...have you that picture in your mind? ... I would gladly transfer it from my own...and what came next...that was worse to see."

"Oh, go on!" said Mme. Varasdin, with exasperation.

"She was knocked down by a motor car and killed on the spot."

"How do you know she was killed?"

"Every one rushed to see — except the man on the motor car. He got clean away. Every one was cursing and shouting, and I heard several people say she was dead. She must have been. I saw the car knock her down."

"At this moment she is probably in the hands of the police and is giving evidence against you," said Mme. Varasdin.

"But if she is dead we are safe. She will not have her address on her clothes."

"You can never tell. She might have a card or a letter on her. Dead or alive, she may send the police here any moment to catch you — with her

property in your hands. Is there no river? Are there no byways in Paris, you fool? How dare you come back with that bag and that purse—to compromise us both?”

The man's face was dazed and his body was shivering with fear.

“What will happen if she lives?” he said, in a whisper.

“The police will come—and this time it will be Cayenne. The life there is not agreeable, I believe. Come; pull yourself together, my friend. Every minute that you spend here is a folly.”

“Why did you tell me to do it?”

“I didn't tell you to do it badly.”

M. Varasdin got up, his eyes staring wide at his wife, his hands thrown out towards her.

“Give me money,” he said; “I must go straight to Buda-Pesth and sell the shares.”

“Are you mad?” said his wife. “You must go straight to South America. I will watch events here, and when it is safe I will go to Buda-Pesth and sell the shares.”

M. Varasdin looked distrustfully at his wife.

“I ran the risk,” he said; “they are mine. I mean to turn them into a million. As for South America, it is too obvious. Besides, it lies across the sea, and I have always thought that if I was in danger I would avoid big ports. I believe in the Danubian towns. From Buda-Pesth I shall go to Sofia.”

"I advise you, if you value your safety, to leave the shares with me," said his wife.

He hardly heard what she said. He was listening to every sound that came up from the street below, and his eyes were haggard.

"I must go," he said. "Give me money."

His wife did not move, but her eyes were fastened on him intently, and she watched him take Amabel's purse from his pocket and empty the contents on the table. There was a small handkerchief, some loose gold and silver, ten hundred-franc notes, and the folded certificate of the Eugénias.

"I can do without you," he said.

"Are you going to keep it all?" she asked; "all the money as well as the shares?"

"I shall want it if the police are after me. You can any time raise enough to join me. Sell your pearls."

"The French police are quick and clever. Of course, you will change your name. But have you anything in your pockets to betray you — except the shares — any letters? Any marks on your clothes?"

The man dived into his pockets and pulled out a silver cigarette-case, a handkerchief, and various cards and letters.

"There is nothing else," he said. "Now I will go."

"I will come with you to the station," said his wife.

"Shall I take a bag with what I want?"

"Nothing — nothing by which you might be known. If you were wise you would leave me the Eugenias."

"And never see either them or you again — and be hunted like a mad dog — and not a penny to make it worth while — do you take me for a fool? You have driven me into a crime — do you think I love the sight of your face when I remember the girl's? I struck the blow — but it is you who have a heart of stone."

"But it is you the police will take," said Mme. Varasdin, and she laughed.

"We waste time," said the man; "I must catch the midnight train."

Mme. Varasdin went to her own rooms and put on a close hat, a thick veil, and a dark, long cloak; clothes in which she was inconspicuous and almost unrecognisable. She did not fasten her cloak yet, and she carried her gloves in her hands. She was not away three minutes, but when she returned to her husband she found him in a state of collapse that threatened to be unmanageable. He was shaking like a man with a palsy; when he tried to stand, he sank back into his chair; when he tried to speak, sobs came from his throat and tears rolled down his grey shrunken face. He met his wife's eyes and found no pity in them.

"I can't walk," he moaned; "what shall I do?"

Mme. Varasdin went to the sideboard. She filled a high tumbler nearly half full of brandy, she took

the little bottle from her dress and emptied it into the glass, she added soda-water and carried the drink to him.

"A dose of morphia will do him no harm," she said to herself, and, whether she believed it or not, her shifty soul hardly knew. She watched him empty the glass. Then she swept together the things on the table, and put them into Amabel's travelling-bag.

"This must go into the Seine to-night," she said.

"I feel better," said M. Varasdin; "I could walk some distance now. We will take a cab where we are not known. But if the police come to-day or to-morrow, what shall you say?"

"I shall have nothing to say. I shall not know where you are or what you have done. We shall not be able to communicate with each other, but that will not trouble you greatly, I imagine. You will console yourself by reflecting that I can sell the pearls."

"I wonder why you are coming with me to the station?" said the man suspiciously. "I don't believe you care whether I am dead or alive."

"I am coming to get rid of this bag, and to see you don't muddle your departure," said Mme. Varasdin. "You know I am not fond of notoriety and the guillotine."

"You would not care—" muttered M. Varasdin. "You would think of yourself, and not of me, even then. You have a heart of stone."

XVI

THEY crept softly down the stairs and across the dark hall to the front door without waking the concierge.

"The less attention we draw to ourselves the better," said Mme. Varasdin. "Our door shuts without a sound if one is careful."

"I can hardly drag myself along," said M. Varasdin. "I feel very queer; I am drunk, I believe. You must have given me too much brandy."

Mme. Varasdin looked up and down the broad, well-lighted avenue. There were a few people about still, and the tram cars were still running. If her husband fell like a log here in the street, and a crowd gathered and the police interfered, all they had done to-night would be of no avail, would be made horribly public, and would bring on her head the utmost misery and shame. The treasure for which she had thrown away the last shreds of self-respect would be found on his person and lost to her; the drug in his system would be found by some meddling physician, found perhaps while Hyacinth was still conscious and could charge her, found and treated perhaps, so that to her torment he remained alive. As he lurched beside her, stupid, sick, and covetous, she did not repent of what she had done, though she threw a sop to her flickering conscience by telling

herself that the dose had been haphazard, and that he might not die.

She turned down a by-street as soon as she could. He shambled along beside her, but his gait began to drag and his breathing to sound heavy, and she was glad to hail the first close cab they met. She helped him in, and then she told the driver to go by the Champs Elysées to a café on the Boulevard des Italiens, a route that at this hour of night would take them through the crowds coming away from the Opera and from theatres. She was not quite sure of what would happen next, but she knew she must somehow make her escape, and that it would be easiest to make it in a crowd.

"Did you tell him the Garde de l'Est?" said M. Varasdin, when they had started.

"Certainly not," she said; "when the police are after you he might remember driving you there. We will get out somewhere near and walk to the station."

The man made no answer but lolled in the corner of the cab, his head shaken with every jolt, his arms hanging limply at his sides. When they passed a café, or crossed one of the open places where streets converge and there are many twinkling lights, Mme. Varasdin looked anxiously at his face, and she saw that the pupils of his eyes were small and sharp, and his mouth a little open; while his breathing grew heavier and his hands felt cold.

She waited a little longer. They were crossing the

Place de la Concorde when she ventured very cautiously to unfasten the buttons of his coat. Her own breath came with difficulty, the suspense of the moment was so painful. Everything hung on the next few minutes, her future, her freedom, ease, or infamy. She felt neither pity nor shame, but horror of his heavy body and his helplessness. To be shut up with him turned her faint, and for an instant she wavered, thinking to call for help. Then she roused herself, took the little bottle from its hiding-place, and left it beside him on the seat. Her hand paused on his arm, slid to his heart, felt the quick, uneven beats, and crept very carefully to the place where the treasure was carried. He made no sign. She understood that he was past all desire, and she half envied him. He had persistently stood at ease while others struggled, and it seemed to her that he was doing so still, sleeping, safe and idle, while she heard the wolves.

But she held in her hand the scrap of paper for which she had gone to the depths. She had possession of the Eugénias and the roll of notes, and a handful of loose coin. And the miracle went on, the treasure was hidden now on her own person, and still he did not wake. She looked out of the cab at the busy life of the main Boulevards they were now traversing. From each theatre a crowd came forth to swell the evening traffic, the cafés were overflowing, and wherever there was some slight attraction, the changing lights of an advertisement, or a gay shop window,

people gathered in clusters on the pavement. The vehicular traffic of Paris is, of course, insignificant compared with that of London, but the combination of bad driving, furious motor cars, steam trams, and heavy carts, bring about some pretty tangles. Mme. Varasdin was on the look-out for a block of this kind, and she found herself in one near the Opera House, from which a stream of carriages was now debouching. The instant her chance came she had the wit and nerve to take it. On one side of the cab there was a puffing motor car, on the other a labyrinth of carriages, her horse's head was nearly inside the door of a tram car, there were market carts and newspaper boys, and cyclists with Chinese lanterns, and a frantic gendarme with a white baton; and behind her more carts and carriages, all for the moment at a standstill. She opened the cab door, saw that the driver was absorbed in an altercation with a cyclist, and stepped to the ground unobserved. The clamour was so great that she ventured to push the door to again, and then she slipped to the back of the cab, and, with some risk to her limbs, made her way to the pavement. As she reached it the tram car started, and the whole block of vehicles moved slowly on.

Mme. Varasdin had Amabel's bag in her hands, and every hour that passed made it a more dangerous thing to carry. There was no telling how soon the police would be on her track or to which members of the force she was known. She looked business-like and

unremarkable in her dark cloak and hat, and as she quietly took her place in a Passy tram car she glanced through her thick veil at her fellow-passengers with the placid air of a woman who has nothing on her mind. She paid her fare with a coin she had taken from her husband's pocket, and when she got to the Etoile she alighted and walked without hurry to the Trocadéro. From there she found her way to a no-man's-land left by the destruction of some Exhibition buildings, a waste area of rubble, bricks, and sand. It took her to a road that gave on the river, and she went close down to the water and saw that at this late hour no one was in sight. She threw the bag as far as she could towards the middle of the Seine. It splashed as it fell, and before the water had closed over it Mme. Varasdin had turned her back and was on her way to the lighted streets again.

Her brain was hard at work all the time trying to follow all the various possible issues of the night's work. If Hyacinth lived and charged her she would defy him to prove his charges. He would have no witness but the cabman, and it was impossible that he should have seen her features when she engaged him. That Hyacinth should be driving with a nameless woman and that she should have robbed him was of a piece with his life. Mme. Varasdin would have no difficulty in proving that. If he died, the empty bottle and his empty pockets pointed to suicide, to the determined suicide of a nameless and desperate man.

The police would make some effort to discover his name and would fail, and he would be buried, and that would be the end of his story.

If Amabel lived, she would charge Hyacinth with assault and robbery, and Hyacinth would have vanished and his injured and deserted wife would not know his whereabouts. If Amabel died, her friends would raise an inquiry perhaps, but Mme. Varasdin could not see that she was in any danger of being connected with it. The girl had been knocked down by a motor car in a low quarter of Paris, and a low crowd had gathered round her, and some one in the crowd had made off with her property. Every one would believe that had taken place.

Of course, Mme. Varasdin saw that she must not sell the Eugénias yet, and that weeks or even months hence the transaction would be risky and difficult. But with the help of Uncle Joseph she thought it might be managed. She would give him a good commission, and he would sell in one of the big markets. The shares would probably pass from hand to hand as a bank-note does; and it is usually as difficult to trace a bank-note as a coin.

Mme. Varasdin had to ring at the street door to get back into the house, but the concierge was able to let her in without getting out of bed. As she passed his office she did as M. Varasdin had done and shouted the name of the family that lived above her, a lively family of many members, who all kept more or less

late hours. She had to find her way to the lift in the dark and send herself up, and then she went into her dining-room, where the gas was still turned on, and where the glass from which her husband drank was still on the table. And now for the first time her nerve gave way a little. This morning the flat had held a household, and in a day she had rid it of life. She stood here alone with her dishonour and the stakes for which she had played. As she caught sight of her face in a mirror she wondered that any one could have sat beside her and raised no cry. Hunted and haggard she looked now that the strain was slackening, and no one stood by to see. She felt solitary, she listened to every sound, and her mind began to follow new issues and to scent new dangers. Her eye fell on the empty glass; she took it up and observed a sediment at the bottom. If the police had arrived in her absence they would have seized it, and as she carried it to the kitchen she asked herself whether she had forgotten any other evidence as damning. When she had washed the glass at the sink and sluiced away all traces of the contents, she went back to the dining-room. Her husband had come straight in here to-night, and had gone from here to the street; the things he had taken from his coat were in the Seine, the glass from which he had drunk stood now with other glasses in a pantry cupboard, the brandy went back into the sideboard. If the concierge had seen him come it did not matter much. His exit with his wife had been unobserved,

and so was her stealthy return. Mme. Varasdin opened a half-bottle of champagne, drank it as she undressed, and fell asleep.

At ten o'clock next day she was out of the house again and on her way to Paris. She would not buy papers at the nearest kiosk and take them upstairs to read, because in Paris you never know with whom your concierge will gossip, or which of your habits he will observe. She walked to the Etoile, got a sheaf of papers there, took a close carriage, and told the man to drive to a registry office at the other end of the town. He started, and she looked eagerly through each printed page, and every paper had two items of news set amongst other tragedies and accidents of the night. One paragraph described three motor car disasters, the moderate crop of twenty-four hours. A car had dashed down a hill and broken itself and its occupants against the sides of a bridge; a car had frightened the horses in a private carriage; a car had knocked down a young lady and vanished without expressing regret or making inquiries. The young lady lay unconscious at the Hospital of Laborisière, and was not expected to live. Her identity was not known.

The other paragraph described the suicide in a cab of a nameless gentleman of middle age. An empty bottle that had contained a strong solution of morphia had been found beside him. The cabman told a story of a woman with the man and of her disappearance. But the gentleman had not been robbed; a watch and

chain of some value were on him and a few small coins. The police were making inquiries, but they had no clues, and they placed no faith in the cabman's story. The Commissary of Police had ordered the body to be on view at the Morgue for three days for purposes of identification.

The Press did not pay great attention to any of these events. Its space and its talent were engaged that week in chronicling the Mexican Boom. The excitement in London and New York was indescribable, and every one with a pen was hard at work describing it. The fever had touched Paris too. Women were speculating as wildly as men. Eugenias had rushed up to fifty.

"But it is magnificent. It is worth while," said Mme. Varasdin to herself, and her hand crept to the bosom of her dress, where, for the present, she carried the shares. "If all goes well, perhaps I can sell a little sooner. It would be horrible to keep them for the slump. I will not hide them in the attic just yet. At present I am in no danger, and to rummage in the attic might attract suspicion. When once Hyacinth is buried, the girl may live or die, but she will have no case against me."

XVII

THE evening papers added nothing of importance. The suicide had not been identified; the unknown young lady who had been knocked down by a motor car still lay at the hospital between life and death, and unable to give any account of herself. By the following day both cases had been crowded out of the papers. A *crime passionnel*, with lugubrious developments, magnetised the city, and the obscure man, who had so plainly and commonly killed himself, the unknown girl, one motor car victim amongst many, were both forgotten. Mme. Varasdin had a new maidservant in the place of the two she had dismissed, and the concierge was told that mademoiselle had returned to England, and that monsieur, in the kindness of his heart, had accompanied her before proceeding on a business journey.

“Why have they taken no trunks?” said the wife of the concierge.

“People do not always stop for trunks,” he said. “Have you observed that madame looks ill and anxious? Monsieur was certainly a charming man, and mademoiselle doubtless found him irresistible. I find it very natural, and madame has the trunks to console her. Let us hope they were well filled. But

I do not know what to do with this telegram that has just arrived for mademoiselle."

It was true that Mme. Varasdin looked ill. Every hour increased her sense of security, but it increased her impatience too, and she burned to be gone and gather in the fruits of her daring. Besides, the days were interminable and the nights without peace. If she had felt quite safe, or if she could have shifted her quarters, she thought the strain of waiting would have been slight. But she saw that some inquiry with regard to Amabel might arise at any moment, and that if she could stay and face it, her future position would be stronger than if she yielded to her nerves and fled. And it was not agreeable to spend endless, silent hours in the flat, where every corner and every object accused her. She studied railway time-tables a good deal, and formed her plans carefully. She thought she would stay on in Paris a week or so, and see any one who came. Her husband had vanished; Amabel had vanished. That was the story she had to tell. For their fate from the moment she saw them depart together she was not responsible.

She had packed a small handbag with her jewels, her cash, and a few necessities; and, instead of the indoor gowns she usually wore, she put on every morning now a neat cloth travelling-dress and walking-shoes. The Eugénias she still carried on her person, and her pearls she had sold in the Rue de la Paix. She did not want to start in a hurry and leave her

clothes behind her, but she wanted to be ready if the necessity arose. With all her thinking, she could not see every possible issue of a situation that involved several people, one of whom still hung between life and death. Some accident might yet undo her, unless she could get clean away.

The second day had come and half gone, when her new maid burst into the room and, with the fuss and loquacity of the untrained continental servant, announced that an English gentleman waited at the door and would not be denied. He asked to see an English lady who lived on the flat, and he would not take her assurance that madame lived there alone. Mme. Varasdin had made up her mind that she would probably have Mr. Sheringham to deal with, but she had not expected him so soon. As she hesitated, he walked in and made some apology for his intrusion. But his manner was aloof and business-like, and, as the maid shut the door behind her, he asked for Amabel.

"Miss Ferrers left me the day before yesterday," said Mme. Varasdin.

"The day I called here! Why did she leave so suddenly?"

"Why have you come back so suddenly? You bade me good-bye for a fortnight."

"I telegraphed to Miss Ferrers yesterday and received no answer."

"Naturally. She was not here to receive or answer

anything, and I cannot help you. I do not know her whereabouts."

"I suppose she left some address for letters."

"Not with me."

"I suppose she went straight to England?"

Mme. Varasdin's hands and eyebrows expressed her ignorance.

"Let me see," she said; "to-day is Friday. It was on Wednesday that you called — on Wednesday that mademoiselle was out all day — running about the streets of Paris, it appears, with Mr. Newby. No one can blame me. I had no authority. But it is unfortunate that the young ladies of your country are not more *convenable*, more like French young ladies. Their freedom scandalises us."

"Yes, I know it does," said Mr. Sheringham. "But what happened?"

"She returned towards evening, still with Mr. Newby, and said she would not spend another night in the house."

"I must see Newby," said Mr. Sheringham.

"He is still in Paris, I believe," said Mme. Varasdin.

Something in her tone made Sheringham pause. He saw that, under her bland manner, she was in a ferment. Her eyes shiftily avoided his, sometimes by looking past him, sometimes by almost hiding beneath her heavy eyelids, and while she talked, her restless fingers were at their old trick, playing now with the toys of her *chatelaine* and now with her rings.

“And how is Monsieur Varasdin?” said Sheringham. The question was one to mark time. He took little interest in that gentleman’s welfare.

“I have no idea where he is,” said his wife.

Sheringham’s glance measured her again — he saw nothing to trust or esteem. He felt sure she was playing her own game, probably a malevolent game, and he feared lest Amabel should be a pawn on the losing side.

“Where did you last see Miss Ferrers?” he asked.

“At the door of the restaurant where we had all dined with Mr. Newby — the day before yesterday.”

“And where did you last see your husband?”

“*Mais — mon Dieu* — at the door of the restaurant. Is it not plain? They departed together.”

“Do you want to insinuate that they are together now?”

“You have not known Hyacinth for fifteen years,” said Mme. Varasdin, with a sigh. “He is one of those men no woman or girl can resist. His adventures have been like the stars in the sky. I have always forgiven him, but it has not always been easy.”

“I may as well tell you that I don’t believe a word you are saying,” observed Sheringham.

“I can hardly expect you to. Of course, you are very angry; but as time goes on you will believe. Mr. Newby will tell you they started together. They have disappeared. They give no sign. Ask Miss Ferrers’ friends if she has arrived in England. Ask at the

Ritz, where Mr. Newby engaged a room, if she slept there. I have done nothing."

"That is odd," said Sheringham suspiciously. "Why have you done nothing?"

"Because I know my husband," said Mme. Varasdin. "As far as I can I always avoid an open scandal. What should I gain by it? Hyacinth will come back to me."

Mr. Sheringham took up his hat and walked to the door, without offering to shake hands with the injured wife. She followed him a little way, and her voice wooed him as he departed.

"Come back and tell me what you discover," she said.

"I may come back—it depends upon what happens," said Mr. Sheringham. "But I am quite sure that your story is preposterous. You have probably hidden your husband——"

He was checked by the start and the sudden pallor he saw on Mme. Varasdin's face.

"Hidden him from his creditors," he finished lamely; but as he drove to Mr. Newby's hotel, it was the lady's glance as he left her that haunted him.

"She is afraid of something," he said to himself, "badly afraid."

Mr. Newby, for a wonder, was in, and expressed his surprise at seeing Mr. Sheringham in Paris again so soon. He gave his guest an easy-chair and a cigar, and asked after the Boom.

Sheringham said it was still growing, and that he would be glad of a whisky and soda.

"I have just called on Mme. Varasdin," he said, when his friend had rung and given the order.

"I thought of calling there myself this evening," said Mr. Newby. "Is she better?"

"She didn't say she had been ill."

"I haven't seen her since the night before last, when we dined together. The truth is, I feel a little bit awkward. You never know how a woman's going to take anything, and as for seeing that there are different sorts in the world, and that you have to conduct yourselves accordingly, it's beyond any woman. But it was a rum start, wasn't it?"

"What was a rum start?" asked Sheringham.

"Oh! haven't you seen Miss Ferrers? I suppose there has hardly been time. When did you leave London?"

"By the early boat this morning."

"Miss Ferrers left yesterday."

"Did you see her off?"

"Unfortunately it was impossible. I was nailed to spend the whole day in Versailles."

A waiter came in with the whisky and soda for Sheringham, and until he had gone the two men smoked and waited.

"Can you tell me why Miss Ferrers left Paris in such a hurry?" said Sheringham, when they were by themselves again.

"I — think she got frightened."

"Frightened!"

His voice and his arrested hand showed that he had taken alarm himself. His cigar went out while he listened to what Mr. Newby had to say.

"I met Miss Ferrers in the Salon. I took her to the Bois, where she expected to meet you. She told a queer story about Mme. Varasdin going into her room at night and stealing her purse. It had upset her a bit, and she said she would return to England next day. I went back to the Avenue Ernani, and something seemed to frighten her there again. A servant she liked had been sent away. So she said she would sleep at the Ritz, and I engaged a room for her."

"You believed her story?"

"Oh yes! Mme. Varasdin spoke of it herself, said she had been sleep-walking. She is a very clever lady, and has a great deal of *je ne sais quoi* about her, but the funny thing in clever people is that they take most of the others for fools. Sleep-walking is too thin. Eugenias are at fifty, and Miss Ferrers had a thousand under her pillow. I didn't want to frighten her ——"

He stopped short, because he saw that he had most effectually frightened Sheringham.

"I never thought about those accursed Eugenias," said the great financier. "The girl was carrying a thousand about with her, and these wolves knew it. Is it true that she left the restaurant with Varasdin?"

"He was to see her to the hotel. I had promised to take his wife round the Montmartre theatres."

"We must go to the hotel at once and make inquiries," said Sheringham. "I am uneasy. You don't know, of course. Varasdin has disappeared."

The two men stared at each other.

"Telegraph to England," said Mr. Newby.

"Come to the Ritz," said Sheringham, and they got into a cab and drove straight to the Place Vendôme.

The hotel clerk turned over the pages of his ledger and had some conversation with another clerk. He remembered Mr. Newby, and the room had been reserved on Wednesday night for the young lady, but the young lady had not appeared.

"Oh, come!" said Mr. Newby, "there's some muddle. You've a lot of people going in and out. A tall young English lady, dressed in grey, and next morning you sent to the Avenue Ernani for her trunks."

"No, they didn't," interposed Sheringham. "The concierge, when he gave me my telegram, said the trunks had never left the house at all. That struck me as suspicious."

"I remember Miss Ferrers," said the clerk. "She was here with Mr. Ferrers in the spring. She has not entered the hotel since."

"I don't like it," said Sheringham, and he went aside with his friend and they consulted together.

"She probably went back to London by the night train," said Mr. Newby. "Can't you wire?"

"Did she tell you where she meant to stay in London?"

"No."

"Then how can I wire? I'll run over and see for myself, and if I don't find her I'll wire to you to-morrow morning and then you ——"

"But how can you look for her at large in London?"

"It won't be quite at large. I know with whom she would communicate, and there might be a letter waiting for me."

"I feel sure she is in London," said Mr. Newby.

"So should I if Varasdin was in the Avenue Ernani," said Mr. Sheringham. "Have you anything on to-morrow?"

"Nothing at all."

"Then wait for my telegram. I may want you to go straight to the police."

XVIII

AT half-past seven next morning Sheringham knocked at Mrs. Hunter's door and explained to the astonished and inquisitive Ginger that he desired to see the cook. Ginger could not understand it, but he understood a little present of five shillings, and in a few minutes Sheringham was shut into the dining-room with Amabel's friend. Mrs. Pugsley had never seen Mr. Sheringham before, but she knew all about him. " 'Im as Miss 'Unter is after," they called him below stairs. " A very pleasant gentleman when he *is* pleasant," the cook thought to herself as she took his measure; and he at once liked her sedate manner and capable, good-humoured face. But what she had to tell him only added to his growing uneasiness. She had not heard from Amabel for a month; she knew nothing of her coming to England. On the contrary, in her last letter Miss Ferrers had said she must stay in Paris because her uncle would expect to find her there.

"Do you think if she was in London she would have let you know?" asked Sheringham.

"I feel sure she would, sir," said the cook. "In fact, it was as good as settled. She was to let me know before she came and I was to live with her either as cook or confidential maid, and I said I hoped

it would be cook, because I understand that work and don't like the sound of the other. But I agreed to go, sir, the moment I 'eard, and George, 'e's mad to go too. Miss Ferrers is a young lady you're very fond of when you know her."

"Yes, I've noticed that," said Sheringham; and he took up his hat. Then he seemed to change his mind, and put it down again.

"Did you expect to find Miss Ferrers in London, sir?" asked the cook.

"Yes, I did. I am very anxious about her, now that I know she is not here. I suppose you feel quite sure you would have heard from her? You don't think she can be staying at some hotel by herself?"

"I wouldn't reckon on it if I was you, sir," said Mrs. Pugsley, anxious herself now. "It's not like Miss Ferrers to say she'd send for me, and then come and never let me know."

"Look here!" said Sheringham, "if Miss Ferrers wanted you in a hurry over in Paris, would you come?"

The cook pondered a little over her reply, before she gave it.

"I might," she said in the end; "I have a sister who obliges."

"What?" said Sheringham.

"My sister goes out obliging, sir. She prefers it. If I went off in a hurry, I'd ask her to do for Mrs.

'Unter till she suits herself. Where do you suppose Miss Ferrers to be at present, sir?"

"I wish I knew."

"Isn't she with friends?"

"Who are her friends? Her uncle in Mexico, and you here, and another man and me in Paris. Now, none of us know where she is."

"But she is living with a foreign lady and gentleman she said."

"She is not with them. The trouble is that she had something of great value in her possession."

"You never know what them foreigners will be up to," said Mrs. Pugsley; "though, to be sure, we ain't all fit for 'eaven in London either. Would you telegraft to me, sir? My mind will go working round 'orror on 'orror now till I hear Miss Ferrers is safe. And I'll come directly if you want me, though foreign travel and foreign ways is not what I've been used to."

"Bring George to take care of you," suggested Mr. Sheringham.

"Rather 'ard on Mrs. 'Unter, perhaps," said the cook, and then her voice changed to one of extreme severity. "Not that George would be missed anywhere; 'e's that prying and mischievous," she proclaimed.

"If you please, Mrs. Pugsley, can I lay breakfast?" said George at the open door; and Sheringham put two five-pound notes into the cook's hands for her

expenses in case he sent for her, and was in his hansom again, and on his way to his office, before Ginger had asked his first question, or had his ears boxed in reply.

Sheringham had managed to communicate with his head clerk, and found that, early as it was, he had arrived at the office and had been busy at the telephone, according to his chief's instructions. He had not been able to hear of Miss Ferrers at any of the large London hotels; and no letter from her awaited Sheringham. At nine o'clock he left for Paris again. Travelling hard made little mark on his strong physique, but his anxiety grew more acute as he reached his journey's end. He had wired to Mr. Newby and hoped to see him at the Nord, and was disappointed. He drove first to the young gentleman's hotel, and heard that he had been out all day and that no one knew when he would return; he drove to his own hotel, and neither letters nor callers had come for him. Then he went out to the Avenue Ernani, and was admitted, and found Mme. Varasdin sitting by herself again, still wearing her quiet cloth gown, and still with a manner that was on guard.

When Mr. Sheringham was shown in, she sprang to her feet, and, as he spoke, he saw first alarm and then relief in her face.

"Miss Ferrers is not in London," he said, "I do not know where she is."

She sat down again, and passed a handkerchief over her eyes, and it occurred to him that she had no tears to wipe away, but, perhaps, an involuntary thrill of satisfaction.

"I, too, have discovered nothing," she said. "I sit here with my sorrow — and the days do not come to an end."

"We must see whether the police can help us," said Sheringham.

"They are such bunglers and so meddlesome. The first thing they will do will be to proclaim to all Paris that my husband has forsaken me. That makes it impossible for him to return. Besides, such publicity would be most injurious to Miss Ferrers."

"You are singularly forgiving. I should not have expected you to consider Miss Ferrers — if you believe your own story."

"Can you think of a more likely one?" said Mme. Varasdin.

"I imagine that the police will — when they hear that the girl had fifty thousand pounds worth of shares in her possession."

The lady blinked, and a moment of tense silence gave emphasis to Mr. Sheringham's reply. He had thrown down the glove, and his challenge contained a suggestion she could not pass by.

"Then for once Hyacinth has been clever," she said, deciding neither to resent nor deny the imputation, but to fit it to her purpose. "I am afraid, how-

ever, that if he has any money he will not come back to me. I wish I knew where he was."

"Have you taken a single step to find out?"

"The world is large," said Mme. Varasdin. "Where should I begin?"

"He may be in Paris still."

"They may be anywhere."

"Well," said Mr. Sheringham, getting up, "my business is to find Miss Ferrers."

"In what way is it your business, if my story is true?"

"You are speaking of my future wife."

"Then it is you who will be singularly forgiving," said Mme. Varasdin.

There was no longer any show of cordiality between them. The man was angry and hostile, and the woman was malevolent and afraid. Her glances had failed to conciliate him or her plight to touch him. He took no pains to hide his doubts of her; he was not held in check for a moment by her appreciation of his qualities, an appreciation she had done her best to convey whenever they met. He was a man she would have followed anywhere, and he had no eyes for her. From the first she had coveted his favour, and from the first she had failed to win it. He stood here as her enemy, and she feared him, would have struck him dead if she could, would have led him captive if she had known how.

"We are companions in misfortune," she said, with

a sigh. "Come and see me again to-morrow. I may have news."

Before Sheringham could reply the salon door was thrown open by the new maid, and Mr. Newby walked in. That he brought bad news was plain to both the people he greeted, and they waited with alarm for him to speak. He turned first to the man.

"I got your wire this morning," he said. "I went straight to the police. They've been awfully decent, and we've found out things. Miss Ferrers is alive."

"Good God, I hope so!" said Sheringham. "Where is she?"

"At the Laborisière. She has concussion of the brain and is still unconscious. But they say now she will recover."

"What happened to her?"

"A motor car knocked her down somewhere in Montmartre. How she got so far from the Ritz no one knows yet. She was alone...it happened about an hour after she left the restaurant...and——"

Mr. Newby hesitated, and both men looked at Mme. Varasdin. Her face was grey and shrunken now, and she stared beyond them with horror in her fixed, expectant eyes.

"Go on," said Sheringham.

"Her bag and purse were stolen. Of course, directly the accident happened a crowd gathered."

"But what had become of Monsieur Varasdin?" said Sheringham. "Why was she alone?"

"Poor Varasdin," said Mr. Newby.

Mme. Varasdin did not speak, and Sheringham, who was watching her, saw that she could not. He saw the twitch in her throat, and the waiting stillness of her body, and the despair of a creature at bay in her eyes.

"Have you found Monsieur Varasdin too?" said Sheringham.

"Yes, I have," said Mr. Newby, in a pained voice.

"Where is he?"

"He is dead. I have just seen him — at the Morgue."

A low, choking groan from Mme. Varasdin checked the young man, and he looked at her helplessly. She was nearer complete collapse of mind and body than she had been at any moment during the last forty-eight hours. In so short a time she would have been safe, safe even if Amabel had recovered and proclaimed the theft of the shares. She could have persuaded the world that her husband had absconded with them, and let the police lead a merry dance in search of him. Her success had hung on the burial of her husband as a nameless suicide, and if Sheringham had stayed away a fortnight as he said he would, if Mr. Newby had not been asked by Sheringham to pry and meddle, her position would have been secure. But the identification of Hyacinth at the Morgue imperilled everything: There would be an inquiry. The cabman would come forward with his story; who could tell what the con-

cierge had seen; and there was the doctor who had prescribed the morphia and knew it to be in her possession. It might never be proved that she administered it; she might face an inquiry and come away scot free. But the shock of the news unnerved her, and to sit there facing those two men, one so obtuse and one so hostile, was more than she could endure. She fell back with hysterical cries, compound of tears and laughter, pitiful to hear.

"I say — where's some brandy?" said Mr. Newby. He bolted into the dining-room and returned with a decanter and a liqueur glass. He poured out the brandy and Mme. Varasdin drank it, and in a few minutes she recovered her self-control.

"I will go with you to the Morgue," she said to Mr. Newby. "I must see him."

"The police will be here directly, you know," said Mr. Newby. "I gave them your name and address. They'll tell you if it's necessary. I should wait if I were you."

"I cannot wait," said Madame Varasdin. "I must see my unhappy husband. I had always warned him that this would happen. He began years ago...began with small doses to relieve pain. I blame myself for leaving him that night. You will remember that we all observed he looked strange."

As Madame Varasdin talked she was conscious that Mr. Sheringham was following what she said with a close, surprised attention that she did not like. She

stopped, but he did not speak; she got up, and he made no motion to arrest her.

"I am going to see him at once," she said to Mr. Newby; "but I can go alone."

"Certainly not," said Mr. Newby, "I will come with you"; and he sat down to wait while she put on her outdoor things. Sheringham waited too.

"I want to know more about Miss Ferrers," he said. "Is she much hurt? Did you hear?"

"Yes, I did. I saw one of the doctors. It's all right, old man. They say she'll pull through now, and be as lively as ever."

"There is a great deal I can't explain," said Sheringham. "Why was she by herself? Who stole her bag and her purse with those shares in it? And there is another thing ——"

"What?"

Sheringham did not seem inclined to say. He walked about the room, and Mr. Newby stared out of the window, and with both men the time passed slowly. They grew impatient when twenty minutes had been wasted so, and still the lady did not come.

"Madame Varasdin *is* a long time putting on a hat," said Mr. Newby at last. "Perhaps she is ill again, poor thing."

"Ring and ask," suggested Sheringham.

The new maid appeared, and was told that her mistress had had bad news of monsieur, and that she was not well in consequence. The gentlemen would be glad

if the girl would ask madame if she still wished to go out with them. The girl went and returned at once.

"Madame is not in her room," she reported.

"Perhaps she is in some other room," said Mr. Newby.

The girl went off again and came back again, and had the same tale to tell. Madame was nowhere on the flat.

The two men looked at each other.

"Has she taken offence?" said Mr. Newby. "Has she gone to the Morgue by herself?"

"I heard some one go softly into the hall," said the maid. "The front door stands open still. Evidently madame did not wish to attract attention."

"It is very strange," said Mr. Newby.

"It is very strange," said the girl, and the men saw she had something more to communicate.

"Well!" they said.

"Madame's travelling-bag...the locked one...has gone from the wardrobe. Madame has perhaps started on a journey."

Sheringham said something vague, and let the girl go. Then he turned to Mr. Newby.

"She's bolted," he said; "she won't go near the Morgue. That was a blind. I should like to know what is in that travelling-bag. And now I'll tell you the other thing that has been going round in my head. What did Varasdin die of?"

"Morphia poisoning."

“She knew it. How did she know it? The manner of his death was not mentioned by you. Most people who lie at the Morgue have been drowned. She spoke of doses. There has been foul play, I tell you, and she is in it. And she has those shares.”

“Good God!” said Mr. Newby. “What shall we do next? The police ——”

“I’m not going to wait for the police,” said Sheringham.

XIX

"I THINK I shall go to the Morgue," said Mr. Newby. "You may be on the wrong tack, and, anyhow, I don't see where else there is to go."

Sheringham hardly heard what his friend said. His eyes were absent, his mind was at work; and when he stirred, it was to ask for a railway book. The two men found one in the dining-room, and it opened with tell-tale ease at the trains travelling towards Vienna from the Gare de l'Est. It was to follow one trail out of many, but to follow it hot, and Sheringham decided to try it.

"Yes, go to the Morgue," he said to Mr. Newby; "if you find no one there, perhaps the police will help you again."

The next moment he was out of the room, and out of the flat. As he emerged from the house he held up a twenty-franc piece to a passing cab, and told the driver on what condition he should have it. The man answered to the bribe, and by favour of fortune, landed his fare undamaged at the railway station five minutes before the Viennese express was timed to start. Sheringham went straight to the booking-office, and asked for a ticket to Nancy. He hoped he would not want it, but he meant to take a journey, if that was the only

way. At Nancy there was a halt of a quarter of an hour, and he could book on there if necessary.

When he reached the departure platform, most people who were travelling in that train were either in their seats or standing beside the carriages they had chosen. A careful glance along the thin scattered groups satisfied him that he knew no one there. Then he got into the train, and walked right to the end of it and back again, and all the while he kept his eyes and ears open for new arrivals. He had entered the first compartment of the hindmost carriage, and had just decided that he was a fool for his pains, when a clanging bell, a whistle, and a scurry on the platform, convinced him that he must instantly jump out or be carried some way from Paris. He cast a cursory glance into the end compartments, found that they were empty, and was making for the door, when he saw through the window the hurrying figure of a tall, thickly veiled lady coming towards the train. He thought he knew her walk, and when she spoke to the conductor he was sure he knew her voice. As the train moved off she settled herself in the compartment adjoining his, and he heard her say that she was going to Vienna.

Sheringham debated with himself whether he should wait, or act at once. He wanted to get back to London. He knew that his head clerk was raging at the chief's not to be understood or forgiven defection in the very midst of a mighty boom in his own market. He wanted

also to get back to Paris and Amabel, and watch, hour by hour, for Amabel's recovery. Nothing drew him to Vienna except an outraged sense of justice, but in a man of his temperament that sense prevails. His affairs, which were intricate and of consequence, and his anxiety about the girl he loved, gave way for the time to his conviction that there was a wrong to set right, and that it fell to him to do it. For his purpose an interview without witnesses was, of course, a prime necessity; and the train had hardly travelled a mile when a dissatisfied passenger spoilt his plan for the time being. A stout, voluble woman came stumping along the corridor in the wake of the conductor, complaining that she had caught her death through an Englishman who would open a window, although she had told him that the night air invariably made people blind. She put her head into Sheringham's compartment, when she saw that here, too, sat one of the crazy, draught-loving race. Finally she subsided next door. So Sheringham waited, got his dinner between two stations, and was back at his post before they reached Chalons. He hoped that the stout lady might descend at Chalons, and that he might be saved from travelling further than Bar le Duc, but she disappointed him. Bar le Duc was her destination. From that hour, the train had a clear run to Nancy of more than an hour, and Sheringham said to himself that he would enter on his return journey there, having done what he came out to do. He had been travelling, without much break

or sleep, for thirty-six hours, but he had never felt more wide-awake. The thought of Amabel steeled his nerves, and fed his anger, for he believed that she had been robbed and deserted, and that the woman next door had a hand in it. He still waited a little. The train sped through the darkness, the wheels rolled, mile after mile, with a monotonous rhythm, and inside the carriages the hush of night began to replace the clatter and movement of the earlier hours. They were not twenty minutes from Nancy when he left his seat, opened the door of the next compartment, and closed it behind him, before the woman, half asleep in the corner, roused and recognised him. The noise of the opening door had not terrified her. She expected, when she looked up, to see the conductor. To see Sheringham instead, frightened her out of her self-control. She gave a start, and a betraying cry of surprise, and her right hand, which was ungloved, crept towards something that lay hidden between her body and the cushioned side of the carriage. He was unarmed, and he guessed at once that she was not.

"I want to see both your hands," he said.

She did not move, and through her veil he could see the glitter of her narrow eyes. She looked as cold and wicked as a snake and he remembered Amabel, and his anger burned within him.

"You can't shoot here, you know," he continued. "You would be arrested at once."

"But you would be out of my way."

"I should do you more harm dead than I mean to do you alive. You had better listen to my terms."

"What do you want of me?"

"To begin with, I want to see your hands."

With a swiftness for which he was not prepared Mme. Varasdin rose and faced him, and the nozzle of the revolver in her steady hand pointed at his heart.

"If you don't go away at once I'll shoot you," she said. "I'll find some story to persuade a French jury. I am a woman. You are an Englishman. I am not afraid. It is your life that hangs on a thread."

But Mme. Varasdin did not understand the hot imperious temper of the man with whom she had to deal in this hour. Like most foreigners she thought that because an Englishman keeps a rein on his passions he has no passions to rouse, and cannot be moved to any extremity of anger. As she threatened Sheringham his face went white, but it was the pallor of a fiercer wrath and a harder determination than her own. She looked to see him flinch and perhaps to turn ignobly at her command; and before she had time to touch the trigger, he swooped like a hawk towards her and caught both her hands. Without hurry and without violence he forced her fingers from the point of danger and the revolver from her grasp. His luck was with him. Taken by surprise, less resolute than he, and mindful perhaps of her precarious position, she did not struggle much, but stared at him with a sort of sour helplessness as he turned the tables on her.

"If you have a knife I shall take it from you," he said. "You had better sit down." He released her hands and she sank back into the corner of the carriage she had occupied.

"The conductor may appear at any moment," she said sullenly.

"I am not afraid of him," said Sheringham.

"You play a fine part — to bully some one weaker than yourself."

"I warn you that I am not a man of sentiment. I believe you have something in your possession to which you have no right. I believe other things about you too, but on one condition I consent to leave them out of the discussion: in short, as far as I am concerned, to let you go free."

"What is your condition?"

"The bonds that you have stolen. The thousand Eugenias."

"Are you mad? I have no Eugenias."

"I give you ten minutes," said Sheringham. "When the train stops at Nancy the Eugenias will be given up to me, or I shall put you in the hands of the police. I shall charge you with the murder of your husband."

The woman began to tremble violently, and Sheringham began to hate the job he had undertaken. But its unpleasantness did not affect his resolve to see it through.

"I can say I have never seen you before and that you have threatened my life," said Mme. Varasdin.

"If I raised my voice the guard would come and the revolver would be found in your possession."

"But the Eugenias would be found in yours," said Sheringham at a venture. He spoke with a bluntness that took the woman aback, and he saw her hand go up to the bosom of her dress and fall to her lap again.

"Any one can own Eugenias," she said.

"Just as you like," said Sheringham. "We will go to the police together and face inquiry. I trust them to find out when and where you bought this revolver. It was probably on your way to the station."

"I wish I had killed you with it," said Mme. Varasdin.

Her eyes were fixed on the man still standing with his back to the carriage door. She recognized that his fighting spirit was more than a match for her own, and that neither cajolery nor bluster would avail her.

"You have no proofs against me," she said.

"The Eugenias will be found on you. Miss Ferrers will tell us how she came to lose them. I have no doubt that your husband was concerned in it. We shall have to trace his movements from the moment he robbed Miss Ferrers to the moment he entered the cab, dying of morphia administered by you."

"It was a suicide."

"Then how did you know it? No one had told you. Mr. Newby said he had seen the body at the Morgue. Most people who lie at the Morgue have died by

drowning. You volunteered in our hearing that this was a case of suicide by morphia."

"He told me he meant to do it."

"Say that to your judges — when the stolen bonds have been found in your possession. Explain to them why you did not attempt to identify your husband's body, and tried to put me off with that preposterous story of his elopement with Miss Ferrers. Really you have not been clever, Madame Varasdin."

"Nevertheless," said Mme. Varasdin, "if it had not been for you — or if you had been just twelve hours later — How could I foresee that you would be meddling in what is none of your business? What right have you to interfere? As for the shares, they are no more yours than they are mine."

"But you will give them up to me," said Sheringham.

The train jogged on through the darkness, and presently began to slacken speed. They were approaching Nancy.

"You must make up your mind," he said. "I see the lights of the city. I am going to act the moment we draw up. I will not be carried on any further."

"Even if I had Eugénias it would be no proof," said Mme. Varasdin, speaking with some violence. "How could you possibly prove that they were stolen from Miss Ferrers?"

Sheringham smiled a little, and he spoke with the

quiet assurance of a man who has the game in his hands.

"I suspected you that day in the Jardin des Plantes," he said. "As we were coming home Miss Ferrers showed me the certificate. I took a precaution. I entered the number in a note-book."

That was the last turn of the screw. Mme. Varasdin knew she had lost the game. Yet she bargained as she drew the shares from beneath her cloak; and she still kept them in her hands, as if to give them up was beyond her strength. Her face was white and wicked, and when she spoke she snarled so that her voice sounded in Sheringham's ears like the voice of a trapped beast who would spring at your throat if he could.

"Why should I trust you?" she said. "You will get the shares and then hunt me down."

"To bring you to justice won't bring the poor devil you drugged to life again," said Sheringham.

"I swear I am innocent of that," she cried.

"Here we are," said Sheringham, as the train drew up. "Now! which is it to be? Will you go on to Vienna, or will you break your journey here?"

She threw the paper on the floor at his feet, and he stooped and picked it up. Then he lifted his hat gravely, and turned to go.

"Stay," she said; and he waited, wondering what she could have to say.

"I suppose you think you have done a fine thing,"

she went on. "You will carry those shares as a love-offering to your bride; and to me and to my fate you will never give another thought. You have taken from me what I risked life and took life to obtain. Oh yes! I killed my husband. I was glad when he died. Do you know what it is to drag through the world with a fool and a knave chained to you? I was free by my own doing. I was rich by my own hands, and you have threatened my freedom and forced my fortune from me. And you do not need the money; neither you nor the girl you love. It is everything to me. For mercy's sake, give me the shares. Give them to me as you would give a crust to a starving dog."

"No," said Sheringham resolutely. "They are not mine to give."

As he spoke he moved more quickly than before from the carriage, for the quarter of an hour had come to an end, and the train was already in motion. He stepped rather hurriedly on to the platform, and did not perceive, in his hurry, that Mme. Varasdin had crept after him. The guard had jumped into his van, Sheringham tried to shut the door of the carriage, a loud-voiced porter ordered him back. By this time he saw Mme. Varasdin close to the open window, and while he turned the handle of the door, she leant out of it, and spoke again.

"Keep that and the shares too, then," she said, and, with her hand covered by the voluminous sleeve of her cloak, she drove a knife into his shoulder. For a mo-

ment he did not realise what had happened, and at first he felt no pain. The rear-light was travelling far down the line, and the officials on the platform were dispersing in various directions, when one of them observed that the tall gentleman who had left the train as it moved out of the station, stood very still, and then staggered and fell. The man ran to his assistance.

“Is Monsieur ill?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Sheringham, and then he fainted.

XX

A WEEK later a cab stopped in front of the Hôtel Ritz, and Mrs. Pugsley, attended by Ginger, got out of it. Mrs. Pugsley wore a waterproof cloak and a bonnet trimmed high on the crown, and tied under the chin. She carried an old leather bag, and she had brought with her a tin trunk and a portmanteau for Ginger. The hotel porter looked at her doubtfully. Ginger paid the cabman with an English half-crown, and was dancing with delight at the man's gesticulations.

"It's all you'll get, Froggy," he said.

"We want Miss Ferrers," said Mrs. Pugsley to the porter.

"Hark at the motor cars," said Ginger, at her elbow; "do you suppose there's a race on? And 'ow quick the Mounseers do talk. I can't make out a word they say. That chap isn't going to take my 'arf-crown. Look at 'im waving 'is 'ands at me. What'll we do?"

"We want Miss Ferrers," said the cook again, and again the porter signed to her to enter the hotel. He thought there was some mistake, and that she would soon emerge again and be driven to quarters where people who travel with tin trunks are welcome.

"Come on," said Ginger. "'E means we're to ask inside."

He led the way. The journey, short as it was, had brought about a state of things that Mrs. Pugsley hoped would not last much longer. Every step in their pilgrimage seemed to leave her more dependent on the boy's counsel, and less capable of dealing with his impudence. He went ahead of her now, and walked up to the clerk's desk and asked for Miss Ferrers.

"Mr. Ferrers," corrected the clerk.

"Oh! if you like," said Ginger; "we say Miss when it's a young lady. Will you please say Mrs. Pugsley is 'ere *and* George. Has Mr. Sherringham arrived yet?"

"P'raps 'e'll call 'im Miss," he whispered to the cook.

The clerk looked more doubtful than the porter had done, but at that hour the usual waiting-room was empty, and he took the new arrivals there. They looked about them with great interest, and in a few minutes a middle-aged gentleman came in to them.

"Did you inquire for Mr. Ferrers?" he said.

"For Miss Ferrers," said the cook, "for Miss Amabel Ferrers."

"Do you know where my niece is, then?" said the gentleman, looking very much surprised.

"I think she must be in a hospital, sir."

"In a hospital? Amabel? Why?"

"Mr. Sherringham says so. I had a long telegraph from him day before yesterday."

"What Mr. Sherringham is that?"

"A Mr. James Sheringham, sir. Isn't he on the Stock Exchange, George?"

"I believe you," said George. "And I've 'eard Mr. 'Unter allude to him as Mexican Jem."

"But Mr. Sheringham does not know my niece."

"Oh yes! he does, sir," said Ginger. "I see 'im when 'e upset the custard over her at Mrs. 'Unter's party."

A light seemed gradually to break upon the puzzled gentleman, and he turned to Mrs. Pugsley.

"Are you the cook my niece was so fond of when she lived with Mrs. Hunter?" he asked.

"I was Mrs. Hunter's cook — until yesterday," said Mrs. Pugsley. "Then I got the telegraft from Mr. Sheringham, which I'll show you at once, sir."

She took the telegram from her bag, and Mr. Ferrers read it.

"Miss Ferrers arrives at Hôtel Ritz, Paris, to-morrow. Recovering from serious illness. Can you be there to receive her? Take George. All expenses paid. Shall arrive Paris soon after you."

"I should say, sir," explained Mrs. Pugsley — "I should say that Mr. Sheringham had been to see me a week previous, and had told me I might be wanted."

"But why does he arrange things for my niece? And why has she been in a hospital? He explains nothing."

"That is what I found when I tried to answer Mrs.

'Unter's questions," said Mrs. Pugsley. "'Owever, we've come. My sister's obliging Mrs. 'Unter, and 'er son, as is a well-beyaved boy as ever lived, 'as George's place. She won't find as much coal on the stairs as usual, I don't think."

Mr. Ferrers said he had been very anxious about Amabel. He had telegraphed from New York, and expected to find her in the hotel on his arrival; but he had received no news of her, and the hotel people had roused his alarm by telling him of her unexplained absence after she had engaged a room. He went out into the hall now to make some further inquiries, and found the booking-clerk engaged with a young gentleman whose face he thought he had seen before.

"I shall return with the lady at once," the young gentleman said, and he brushed against Mr. Ferrers as he turned to come away. It was Mr. Newby, and he recognised Amabel's uncle directly.

"Well I am—" he cried. "Won't Miss Ferrers be jolly glad to see you here!"

"You too?" said Mr. Ferrers. "Is *every one* expect me looking after Amabel?"

"I'm only doing it by proxy, you know," said Mr. Newby. "Sheringham's the man. But as he's been laid up at Nancy — I say, I've got to find some one Sheringham sent for. She's a cook really, but she's going to take care of Miss Ferrers, and there's a boy too, and they are somewhere loose about the hotel."

"I've seen them," said Mr. Ferrers. "I'll take you to them. But just tell me what has been the matter with my niece?"

"She was knocked down by a motor car and nearly killed. Concussion of the brain and complications. She looks a bit off colour still. You must prepare for that."

Mr. Ferrers was shocked to hear of Amabel's bad luck, and Mrs. Pugsley said the police ought to know better than to allow such things. The whole party drove to the hospital to fetch Amabel, and the two gentlemen went inside and saw one of the doctors. They were told that the girl must still be guarded from all fatigue and excitement, and that it would be unwise to dwell in any way on her accident or the events leading up to it. Mr. Ferrers thought it was hard advice to follow, but when he saw Amabel he recognised its wisdom. She looked white and weak still, and her pleasure in seeing him again and then in seeing Mrs. Pugsley and Ginger, was as much as she could bear. Her uncle invited Mr. Newby to lunch, and after lunch the two men were sitting with Amabel when a hotel servant opened the door and Mr. Sheringham walked into the room. He carried his arm in a sling and looked pale, but not as pale as Amabel. He went straight up to her, and Mr. Ferrers watched his niece and drew his own conclusions.

"I had no idea that my niece knew you," he said, when Amabel presented Sheringham to him.

"You called him by some nickname when you said he was banging your market," said Amabel.

Mr. Ferrers opened his eyes, and Mexican Jem stroked his moustache and smiled.

"I dropped a hundred thousand in that slump," Sheringham said. "But, of course, I was right at the time. I see Eugenias are at fifty."

"By the way, Amabel, I gave you a few," said Mr. Ferrers. "Where are they? I suppose that's a question I may ask you?"

"I haven't got them," said Amabel, and her uncle saw that he had agitated and distressed her. "I have always thought that M. Varasdin took them after he knocked me down."

The three men seemed to speak at the same moment and to come a little nearer to her, moved by horror and surprise.

"If any one of you had been there," she said, and she shivered at the memory of that miserable hour. She saw the long, dark, lonely street again — she felt the stunning blow.

"Never mind," said her uncle anxiously — "never mind the Eugenias. If I had known I wouldn't have asked about them."

"But here they are," said Sheringham, who, with his right arm in a sling, had found it difficult to extract the certificate from his coat.

"Hullo!" said Mr. Newby. "Then you were on the right tack after all."

"It's as plain as daylight. Varasdin stole them from Miss Ferrers. His wife stole them from him when she had drugged him."

"But how did you get them out of her?"

"I charged her with the murder of her husband."

"Why is your arm in a sling?" asked Mr. Ferrers.

"Oh, she had a dig at me with a knife!" said Sheringham. "The Nancy police could get nothing out of me for forty-eight hours, so she got clean away. I don't suppose they will ever find her."

Mr. Ferrers said at this point that he had a great many questions to ask, and he took the two men into his own room and heard all they could tell him of what had happened. None of them doubted that Mme. Varasdin had poisoned her husband.

"It was not suspected here," said Mr. Newby. "He was buried as a suicide."

"If she is ever brought to book for it, she will have herself to thank," said Sheringham. "Of course, the police inquired into her attack on me. I had to give her name. I said as little as I could. We can't bring Varasdin to life again, and I should prefer to have done with her."

"I'm glad she didn't get off with the shares," said Mr. Ferrers admiringly to Mexican Jem. "You really have been a first-rate friend to Amabel."

"Well, that's only natural," said the financier, and there and then he explained why.

"But I looked forward to settling down in New

York and having her to keep house for me," said Mr. Ferrers.

"I'll ask her to keep house for both of us in London," said Sheringham, and he went off to Amabel and found that she had been resting, and felt the better for it.

"But I dream of it," she said nervously. "I see the long dark street and his face. The motor car comes and I can't escape. He is dead. I hope I need never see her again. Suppose she went to New York and I came across her there?"

"I know a certain way of avoiding that," said Sheringham; "marry me and live in London."

"I wonder whether Uncle Michael would like it?" said Amabel, when her lover had softened the bluntness of his proposal by explaining at some length and in the usual way how ardently he desired her to accept him.

"We will invite him to live with us," said Sheringham. "To tell the truth I have done it already."

"Did you feel so sure of me?" said Amabel rather wistfully.

"Not of you so much as of myself from the first moment I saw you. And when a man sets his heart ——"

"When Mexican Jem sets his mind, you mean ——"

"But I did feel sure of you too," said Sheringham, "I felt sure from the moment I met you in old Gregorio's ballroom. You may deny it if you will, but you looked delighted to see me."

"So I was," admitted Amabel.

"Then there is nothing more to be said," observed Mexican Jem.

But they found a great deal to say until Mrs. Pugsley and Ginger came into the room to bring Amabel some tea made with the help of an English tea-basket.

"Miss Ferrers and I are going to be married," said Sheringham very soon to Mrs. Pugsley. "We shall want a cook."

"*And* a under-footman," said Ginger.

"And a best man," said Sheringham to Mr. Newby, who appeared with Mr. Ferrers just then.

"And some one to give you away, my dear," said Amabel's uncle.

"Let us be married to-morrow," said Mr. Sheringham.

"I have no clothes," said Amabel.

"But you have a thousand Eugénias and one uncle," said Mr. Ferrers.

"And you have two trunks," said Mr. Newby. "I forgot that. I explained about them to the police, and they are awaiting your instructions at the Avenue Ernani."

"Shall I go and fetch them, sir?" said Ginger, and he was allowed to do so.

"Of course, it can't really be to-morrow," said Sheringham. "At least I should think not. As British subjects abroad there would be formalities."

"Of course it can't be to-morrow," said Amabel.

"How can you have a wedding without a wedding gown?"

"And a wedding cake," said Mrs. Pugsley.

"Are there no gowns and cakes in Paris?" said Sheringham.

"There may be gowns," said Amabel.

"But no cakes," said Mrs. Pugsley. "I have often been told that foreigners get married without them."

"I must really go back to London," said the bridegroom. "I don't want to find myself bankrupt on my wedding day."

"I would give you the thousand Eugenias," said the bride.

"You shall go back to London to-morrow," said Mr. Ferrers. "The doctor shall fix the date of our return, the milliners shall fix the date of the wedding, and you, Mrs. Pugsley, shall fix the height of the cake."

"I'm glad we're going back to London," said Mrs. Pugsley. "I've heard a deal of French cooking all my life, and now I've tasted it, and I don't deny it has points, which is more than I can say for the meat. Of course, they can cook. With old cab-horse for beef, they'd die if they didn't."

"I shall go back to London too," said Mr. Newby. "I look forward to a grilled steak myself."

"Never mind milliners and doctors," said Amabel. "We'll all go back to-morrow."

"I call that a sensible remark," said Mexican Jem.

ANNE AND THE ANARCHIST

I

ONCE upon a time there was a clergyman's widow who lived in a little country town, and had two daughters called Anne and Alice. They were very poor. In fact, the united income of the family did not exceed two hundred a year, which is not much when three ladies have to pay for all they receive and give out of it. Mrs. Crewe had been a pretty woman in her time, and she saw with satisfaction that her girls were taking after her. So she hoped that in spite of their poverty they would some day marry and relieve her income of the long, depressing strain upon it. In many respects she was a foolish woman, but she took pains with the education of Anne and Alice. She sent them regularly to school, and she looked after their health and their manners as well as she could.

Luckily there was an excellent school in Burnside, where the girls were taught for next to nothing. Nevertheless, in after years, Mrs. Crewe bore the school a grudge, because she felt sure that Anne had picked up her unfeminine ideas within its walls. Mrs.

Crewe had lived in Burnside all her life, and her opinions on most matters were vague, but she had no doubts at all about what was feminine and what was not.

In complexion and stature the sisters resembled each other ; but in expression and manner they were widely apart. Alice, every one said, was a sweet girl. She had a willowy figure and great pathetic eyes. She cried rather easily, and often had headaches, and at school she did not distinguish herself. But in Burnside most people thought her a much nicer girl than her sister, and when Mr. Beeston went to the house twice in one week, everybody hoped he went for Alice and not for Anne.

No one in Burnside denied that Anne had brains. In fact, some folks went as far as to say it was a pity she had not been born a man, and therefore meant to use them. At school she carried off prize after prize, and for many a year she played the dangerous part of show-scholar. But she never grew disagreeably conceited, although you could have found people in Burnside who thought her so. There is a degree of conceit that most of us easily forgive to youth, because we know what shocks it will sustain in the battle of life, and how soon a sound nature sloughs it. Of course, young people are tiresome creatures. They come knocking at our doors with their new ideas, and their inconvenient requests, and their anxiety "to go out for to see"; and they hardly listen when we im-

plore them to avoid knocks, and stay quietly at home. "Knocks?" cry they. "Honour and glory and the kingdoms of the world." At the age of seventeen Anne Crewe said Burnside stifled her.

She wanted to go to college, but that was out of the question, because of the expense. She had no desire to teach, or to nurse, or to stand behind a counter. She wanted to write, and this ambition had not been roused by inward genius, but by the schoolmistress's sister, who was a successful journalist. The sister sometimes stayed in Burnside, and always made much of Anne. So when the girl found she could not go to Girton, she said she wished to live in London and write for the press. Such a proposal had never issued from the lips of a Burnside young person in the memory of man, and when Mrs. Crewe invited the town to condole with her it condoled unanimously. The oldest maiden inhabitant told Anne that if she stayed at home like a good girl she would be preparing herself for the duties of a married woman. Of course, as she had no money and few friends, she might never be married; but every girl should wish for a home of her own, and spend her youth in scrambling for it. Anne did not take these remonstrances so patiently as she should have done, and she was even indiscreet enough to say she would rather go to Girton than marry her grandfather's friend, as her schoolfellow Rosie Lloyd had done. From the moment this remark became public property, Burn-

side made up its mind that Anne Crewe was "unfeminine," and wondered thereat, which shows that Burnside went with the swim, and puzzled itself about questions of heredity.

At sixteen a girl without money cannot as a rule do much to escape from uncongenial surroundings; and when you are young you think that the thing you want and cannot have at once will not be worth having later on. Poor Anne fretted and fumed all through her early youth, and offended her neighbours by showing how much she wished to get away. A few felt sorry for her, but the majority called her an ambitious, discontented girl, and supposed that they completely described her. The same people would have been full of pity for a bird beating its wings against a cage. Many of us are kinder to animals than to human beings.

It was only to be expected that a sweet girl like Alice would behave very differently from her sister, and it seemed like a reward for good conduct when, at the age of seventeen, she received one of those summonses all women ardently desire. In Burnside the marriage of a penniless young lady was not an everyday event. There were very few young gentlemen in the town, and five girls out of six never married at all. Mrs. Crewe may have been a silly woman, but this fact had not escaped her observation; so when the struggling local solicitor, Mr. Beeston, proposed to Alice, she urged the girl not to throw away a chance that would prob-

ably never occur again. Like a dutiful daughter, Alice obeyed her mother and accepted the man. She did not like him much, but Mrs. Crewe said that women always grew fond of their husbands after marriage. Meanwhile, she enjoyed getting new clothes and wedding presents, and she thought it was better to be called Mrs. Beeston than to remain Alice Crewe all her days. The young couple would be very short of money. Anne foresaw that her sister would be worse off as a matron than she had been as a maid, and she asked her mother to point out the advantages of a marriage neither sanctified by affection nor comforted by money. But Mrs. Crewe only quoted texts at her elder daughter, and continued to cut out underclothing for her younger one.

In course of time Anne had an offer, and refused it. She did not care for the man, and she said she would not marry for board and lodging. When this view of hers leaked out, Burnside began to think her hardly respectable. It compared her with that sweet, womanly creature, her sister, who had five children and a broken constitution at the age of twenty-six, and it felt quite relieved when she suddenly cut her leading strings and escaped to London. For five years she had tried through the penny post to get her foot on the journalistic ladder, and at last some one at the top reached her a helping hand. An editor who had been taking anything she sent of late offered her regular work.

From Burnside Anne Crewe vanished. She did not make a name by her writing — at least, not a name that reached Burnside. Her mother said that she sent cheerful letters, and seemed able to maintain herself; in fact, she once or twice came to Alice's assistance with a cheque. At first Mrs. Crewe used to write for Anne whenever anything went a little wrong: if her servant gave notice, for instance, or if Alice's children had the measles. Anne used to explain that she had regular work to do, and could not run off when it suited her, but no one in Burnside accepted that excuse for her selfish behaviour. Though she sometimes sent Alice a cheque, people agreed in whispers that money cannot make up for personal sympathy. Anne did not even spend her annual holiday in Burnside, and perhaps it was natural her mother should think this unkind. She had no idea that her daughter did hard work for her pay, and really needed rest and bracing air once in twelve months. Mrs. Crewe was very silly about it. She refused to visit Anne or to travel with her, and in Burnside she hardly ever spoke of her. People thought there must be a good reason for her silence, and they pictured Anne starving in a garret, addressing an unemployed mob from a cart, and probably wearing a divided skirt.

Mrs. Crewe always talked of "my daughter Mrs. Beeston" in a voice of maternal pride, although poor Alice's affairs were far from flourishing. She had not learned to love her husband after marriage; and

you can hardly blame her for this, because he had turned out a drunkard as well as a fool. He was his wife's inferior in every respect but that of physical strength, and he proved his superiority in this one point by beating her. Of course his practice did not flourish, for his habits were not hidden under a bushel, and as his family increased every year, it soon became difficult to satisfy their appetite for bread and butter, as well as his own appetite for drink. He had a long-suffering set of clients, and a mother-in-law who would starve herself for her child and grandchildren, so he took things easily. Mrs. Crewe had a weak spot in her understanding for her son-in-law the lawyer, even when she had seen the bruises on Alice's arms.

"Are you sure you didn't provoke him, darling?" she said.

Some of the children died, and the others were usually ill. They were born without constitutions, and brought up without care, for at the age of twenty-six their mother had neither strength nor spirit left. Poverty, sickness, and sorrow had worn out the girl who had given herself so lightly at her mother's bidding. The parent blunders, and the child pays; so it was, so it is, and so it ever must be.

But it is doubtful whether Mrs. Crewe realised that she had not done well for her daughter in advising her to marry Mr. Beeston. She would have been bitterly disappointed if Alice had not gone forth from her

house as a bride. She seemed to consider the world a vale of tears, in which it is better to have a drunken son-in-law than none at all, and more satisfactory to bury grandchildren than never to possess them. She still had the pleasure of alluding to him as "my son-in-law," but this was soon the only pleasure left to her in connection with Mr. Beeston.

There are some unhappy women in the world who can imagine what his wife and children suffered at his hands; what the years brought them of want and bodily terror. Once, in a drunken fit, he half killed his eldest boy; another time he set a dog at his wife and brought on a serious illness. Over and over again the children were saved from starvation by Mrs. Crewe and various friends. And every year Alice carried a child beneath her breaking heart, a child born to a father's curses and a mother's tears. At last, one winter evening, Mr. Beeston went into his wife's room with a hatchet, and said he was going to murder her. He had done this before, but Alice had never got used to it. Her nerves were weak. She managed to escape to a back room and lock the door against him; but as he followed her with the hatchet, and began very coolly and resolutely to cut out a panel of the door, and as the children were in the room with her, she felt driven to open the window and call for help. Otherwise, she reflected, he would come in and kill them all, and their fate would be described in one of those little newspaper paragraphs that you find un-

der the heading of "The Provinces," and do not read because they are so disagreeable.

Luckily for Alice their doctor heard her calling, and he happened to be a man with his wits about him. He came into the house armed with a bottle of brandy, and invited Mr. Beeston to share it with him. When the bottle was finished the lawyer could not move. Alice and her children escaped to Mrs. Crewe's house, and the doctor, with the help of a colleague, carried the sot to the nearest lunatic asylum, where the authorities agreed that he had better finish his days. So that was the end of Alice's married life; and the problem that now presented itself to Mrs. Crewe was how to make her income of two hundred pounds support herself, her sickly daughter, and three sickly children. The sale of Mr. Beeston's business would hardly suffice to pay the asylum fees.

When Mrs. Crewe had applied herself to the problem for some time, without much success, business connected with Mr. Beeston's disordered affairs took her up to London. She wrote to Anne beforehand, and received a warmly worded invitation by return of post. Anne said she could put her mother up, and, if possible, would meet her at the station. But just before Mrs. Crewe started, a letter came to say that Anne could not be at the station, because she had to go into the country and interview a Russian Anarchist. She told her mother to take a cab from St. Pancras to St. George's Mansions, to ask for the key of Miss Crewe's

flat, to instal herself in the blue bedroom, and to make herself tea by the sitting-room fire.

"It sounds quite mysterious," said Alice to Mrs. Crewe; "as if Anne had made a clandestine marriage, and set up a home of her own. But if she were married, she would not be running about the country interviewing Anarchists."

"It seems an odd thing for a young lady, and my daughter, to do," said Mrs. Crewe. "Poor, dear Anne! I suppose she will have lost all her good looks."

"I don't know," said Alice gloomily. "She has not had so hard a life as I have."

"Not so hard a life!" repeated Mrs. Crewe in amazement; "but she has earned her own living for years, and you have been supported by your husband."

Alice looked in the glass at her grey hair, her sunken cheeks, and at a scar on her forehead, but she said nothing. It was time for Mrs. Crewe to go.

Her train arrived at St. Pancras a little late, and she did not get to St. George's Mansions until five o'clock. She was taken up to her daughter's flat in the lift, and then left to herself, and as she peeped in at each room, she felt like the girl in the story of the Three Bears. It was really a very small place, and the furniture had not cost much; but you must remember that Mrs. Crewe knew nothing about the ways of the modern bachelor girl. She spoke of every single woman as an "old maid," and expected her to be

either soured or silly. She sat down in her daughter's sitting-room and wondered what the world was coming to, and how much Burnside would believe of what she told them when she got back.

Anne had taken great pains with the room, but her friends saw nothing very wonderful about it. Perhaps they envied her the oriel window with two little steps up to it. She had found the pretty fireplace ready for her, and the green tiles, and the white paint, and a delicate wall-paper. Her one extravagance had been a Persian carpet. The chairs and tables were plain cheap ones; books and pots and pictures collect themselves. She had bought daffodils in honour of her mother's visit, and the sun always shone in of an afternoon, when he shone on London at all. So the room looked pleasant and spring-like, and, in Mrs. Crewe's opinion, quite luxurious. Presently Anne arrived, and she looked pleasant and spring-like too.

"My dear!" exclaimed her mother, "you seem younger than Alice, and prettier than ever."

"I have not had the trouble poor Alice has," said Anne, and she kissed her mother affectionately.

"Poor Alice!" she said again, half to herself, as she made the tea.

Somehow it had never occurred to Mrs. Crewe to think of her married daughter as "poor Alice"; but to her Burnside friends she had often spoken of "poor Anne."

"You must work very hard to earn all this," she

said, looking round the room. She could not give up her old point of view without striking a blow for it.

"Yes, I work hard," said Anne.

"But you look very well."

"I am very well."

Mrs. Crewe sighed.

"Poor Alice!" she said after a pause, and she felt that since she arrived in London she had travelled far.

They talked chiefly of Alice all the evening; and it was only as Anne bade her mother good-night that she lingered a little and said something of her own affairs.

"They have just made me sub-editor," she exclaimed; "that means an increase of salary. Then I write for some of the Colonial papers. I shall be able to help you and Alice. I had no idea things were so bad."

"But, my dear," said Mrs. Crewe, "do you never think of marriage yourself?"

Anne blushed.

If it had not been for that blush, Mrs. Crewe would have gone to bed with the pleasant conviction that the worst of her troubles were over. Instead of which she began the very next day to look out anxiously for its cause. She soon observed that in Anne's talk and Anne's plans the name of Mr. Zagadin occurred more often than any other; and she wished her daughter would mention his age and prospects, or, better still, present him, so that Mrs. Crewe could judge whether Anne's establishment in life as Mrs. Zagadin would be

a satisfactory step in her career. If she married, she would probably be unable to help her mother and sister much. A matron has more claims on her purse than a spinster, and less control of her money. Nevertheless, Mrs. Crewe hoped that Mr. Zagadin was a fine fellow, and would press his suit. Even though she had to pinch and scrape to the end of her days in consequence, she wished to see Anne married — that is, she wished it if Mr. Zagadin passed muster. Formerly, she would have wished it in any case.

Before she had been twenty-four hours in town the opportunity she desired presented itself. Anne came home earlier than usual, and said that Mr. Zagadin had wired to ask whether he might come to dinner there that night. She had arranged already for extra supplies, and she had brought in fresh flowers for the table. She set it herself with mimosa and green glasses, and then she went away and put on her best blouse. Mrs. Crewe, who had spent a depressing afternoon over her son-in-law's affairs, hoped that the sight of Mr. Zagadin would raise her spirits. She sighed a little over his name, and wished it was a Mr. Smith or Brown for whom Anne brought home mimosa sprays.

"What is he, my dear?" she asked, as her daughter and she sat over the fire awaiting their guest.

"An Anarchist," said Anne; "a Russian Anarchist."

"Dear me! Not the one you interviewed yesterday?"

"That was his cousin, who is a great inventive

genius, they say. He told me he had nearly found out how to make bombs as small as peppercorns, and so powerful that if you dropped one from the top of St. Paul's, it would wreck London."

"How terrible! But your Mr. Zagadin isn't that kind of Anarchist, I hope?"

"He isn't inventive. He is in very bad health, poor fellow, ever since he was tortured."

"Tortured!"

"Yes; he will show you the marks on his hands. And then he worked in the salt mines for years, and his eyes are weak. So are his lungs, because he escaped in winter, and nearly died of exposure."

"But, my dear, how does he earn his living? Being an Anarchist won't pay his weekly bills, I suppose."

"I don't know about that. Of course, mother, you mustn't expect him to look and talk like a Burnside young man."

"A Burnside young man wouldn't ask himself to dine with a young unmarried lady," said Mrs. Crewe at once, for this had been on her mind.

"Oh, he wouldn't think anything of that," said Anne.

"But, my dear, Anarchists are such wicked people."

"Poor Mr. Zagadin isn't wicked."

"But they want to kill everybody."

"This one wouldn't hurt a fly—at least, not an English fly."

"I suppose he won't have any dynamite *with* him?" said Mrs. Crewe nervously,

II

MRS. CREWE looked at the Anarchist and the Anarchist looked at her, and neither of them guessed how little two people so wide apart could see of each other. The Anarchist's dreadful doctrines were not written on his face or presaged by his body. Mrs. Crewe thought she had never seen a man so mild and fair and small; and when she heard him cough, she wished she could put him to bed with a mustard plaster and a hot drink. He had, however, eaten an excellent dinner, and now, with the permission of his hostess, he was smoking a cigarette. Anne had warned her mother that he would wish to do so, and Mrs. Crewe had said that of course you could not expect an Anarchist to observe conventional rules and refrain from tobacco in the presence of ladies. Probably he associated with ladies who smoked themselves. Anne said that it was quite likely, and determined not to get out her own cigarette-case this evening.

Mr. Zagadin talked good, fluent English, and he told his stories with little dramatic gestures that gave them point, and convinced Mrs. Crewe of his honesty. He could not describe the horrors of the knout so vividly if he had not seen it administered — the track of the peppercorns, but Mr. Zagadin knew

and his smile came with a nervous twitch that made you miserable, and all the evening his cough tore him in pieces. Yet he went on talking, and the two women listened, fascinated. All he had to tell them stirred their deep compassion, and the poor little man himself did likewise. A child would have seen that he was half-starved and too thinly clad. When he said good-night, Mrs. Crewe wished it was possible to wrap the roast beef in brown paper and put it in his pocket, but she felt sure that even an Anarchist would consider such behaviour a breach of etiquette.

“Poor little man!” she said, when Anne came back to the fire. Anne looked at her mother gratefully.

“Yes, I know,” she said; “one longs to be the sun and shine on him.”

There is no ignorance so dark and obstinate as the ignorance of near relationship may be. Strangers will not belittle or exalt you as unfairly as your kith and kin will when they are inclined either way. Mrs. Crewe had never taken the trouble to readjust her ideas of Anne, whose early youth had vexed and puzzled her. But to-night scales fell from her eyes, and for an amazing moment she saw her child as others saw her — a bright, sweet-tempered woman with brains and energy, able to help a creature weaker than herself; willing, perhaps, to give herself unwisely away.

“What a pretty blouse that is!” she said; and Anne thought the observation rather silly and ill-

timed. She did not know what wise, appropriate reflections had preceded it.

Nothing more was said about Mr. Zagadin that night, but Mrs. Crewe lay awake for hours thinking of him. Self-sacrifice is presumably a virtue, but it is not the one a mother wishes her child to practise when she chooses a husband. At least, most mothers would prefer more cheerful reasons for a wedding. Of course, Mrs. Crewe still desired a wedding, and she was sure, after one evening's acquaintance, that Mr. Zagadin did not resemble Mr. Beeston. He was evidently amiable, though a little dazed in his mind. It was most unfortunate that his physique should be so feeble and his opinions so wicked and inconvenient. How can a woman settle down comfortably with a man who may be "wanted" any moment under the Dangerous Explosives Act? True, it was his cousin who was on the track of the peppercorns, but Mr. Zagadin knew all about them. True, also, that Mr. Zagadin said neither he nor his cousin wished to drop them from St. Paul's, because they felt most grateful to the English people for allowing them to pursue their researches unmolested. But Mrs. Crewe supposed that, when they were manufactured, the two gentlemen would drop them somewhere—probably on the homesteads of their own people. She thought that if the Russian Government caught him again, it would go very hard with him. In fact, he had said as much, and yet spoken as if his return might be ordered

at a moment's notice any time. Moreover, the poor fellow was in bad health. Even if he knew how to earn a living, or wished to do so, he would not be well enough. Apparently he sat indoors all day translating abstruse German philosophy into Russian. It was a fine employment, no doubt, but not one by which a man can support a wife and family. Mrs. Crewe did not know much about the ins and outs of Grub Street, but she knew that.

During the next few days Mrs. Crewe tried hard to find out Anne's point of view, because, after all these years of semi-estrangement, she could not expect to have much voice in her daughter's affairs. But on this subject Anne was not communicative, and when her mother had been a week in London she still did not know whether the Anarchist would ever be her son-in-law. It was an uneasy position, because by the end of the week she had quite made up her mind that she did not wish him to be. Whenever she could she engaged Anne in conversation about Anarchists — their tenets, ways, and prospects in life. She also read one or two numbers of a little newspaper in which Mr. Zagadin and his friends expressed their opinions. She also saw Mr. Zagadin nearly every day, and heard him cough and watched him smile. By the end of the fourth day her nerves were not what they had been, and when she went to sleep she had bad dreams of plots and explosions. In the daytime, as she travelled about London by train and omnibus, she wondered

whether the apparent peace and safety everywhere would soon be exchanged for the most awful scenes of bloodshed and violence. If the little newspaper were a true prophet, this great city, these busy, prosperous citizens, would soon be scattered and destroyed by a handful of Mr. Zagadin's friends. Mrs. Crewe felt that when this happened it would be most unpleasant to admit that Anne was Mrs. Zagadin, especially in Burnside, where no one had ever appreciated Anne. It would spoil entirely the impression Mrs. Crewe meant to make when she got back by describing Anne's success and Anne's clothes and furniture. Burnside had openly pitied both Alice and her mother for all they endured at the hands of the lawyer. It is in human nature to wish a taste of change. Mrs. Crewe had drunk of pity to the dregs, and since her arrival in London she had looked forward to stirring a little harmless envy by her pictures of Anne's flat.

Mr. Zagadin usually paid his visits in the evening or on a Sunday afternoon. Twice a week he came as a matter of course to give Anne a lesson in Russian. The other evenings some excuse or accident accounted for his coming; but unless Anne meant to go out, he always came. Mrs. Crewe and he were excellent friends, and she sent to Burnside for a bottle of home-made cough mixture that her grandchildren took every winter. She advised Mr. Zagadin to try a double dose at bedtime, since he suffered from sleeplessness, and she had been so distressed by the holes in his coat that

she persuaded him to let her borrow it for twenty-four hours and thoroughly mend it. He did not appear until he had it back again, and she felt sure that he possessed no other. She could not help liking him, and sometimes, when Anne was away for a little while, they had animated discussions about the vast questions in which he was interested. They were such very big, difficult questions, that hitherto they had not come in Mrs. Crewe's way either for discussion or consideration. But so long as Mr. Zagadin could talk he did not seem to mind much who listened, and Mrs. Crewe did her best to wrestle with his erring spirit. Her experience as a Sunday-school teacher stood her in stead. But every word he spoke convinced her more firmly that he was not the man for Anne.

One afternoon she was sitting by herself and trying to make up her mind that she must soon go back to Burnside and leave her daughter to manage her own affairs. She felt happier than usual about Alice, because her sister had just sent her a cheque for fifty pounds, and she would have felt happy about Anne if it had not been for Mr. Zagadin. She had enjoyed her visit to London. Anne had taken her to several theatres, and bought her a new bonnet and cloak, and invited people to meet her — respectable people who possessed more than one coat and did not want to blow up their fellow-creatures — not even those who possessed twenty coats to their one. Mrs. Crewe saw that a capable, generous woman like Anne may be

almost as useful to her family as a man, and when she saw that, she had made fair progress for a woman of her age and superstitions. Nevertheless, she would not have grudged her daughter to a steady-going Mr. Smith. She did grudge her to Mr. Zagadin.

Mrs. Crewe had just put the little brass kettle on for tea when the door-bell rang. She had to answer it, and she never liked doing so, because she always expected a tramp or a burglar. It relieved her greatly to hear Mr. Zagadin cough as she crossed the hall. She knew his cough quite well, and she hurried to let him in.

"You ought not to be out in this weather," she said, for it had poured with rain all day, and she saw that he looked grey and cold. The rain stood in drops on his thin beard and dripped from his umbrella. He could not speak for coughing.

"My daughter is not at home," continued Mrs. Crewe, "but you had better come in and get dry, and let me give you a cup of tea. You'll catch your ——"

She smothered the end of her phrase in active care of his hat and umbrella. He looked so like death from cold that she felt a delicacy about reminding him of it.

"I must see your daughter," said Mr. Zagadin. "When will she be home?"

"Oh! any time. I don't quite know," said Mrs. Crewe.

Mr. Zagadin followed her into the sitting-room, sat

down in an easy-chair close to the fire, and shivered. Mrs. Crewe looked at his face, and then she looked at his feet. She was an elderly lady and he was a very young man, and he was sick unto death and he had a hole in his boot.

“Take off your boots directly!” she commanded. “We’ll dry them. If you’re afraid of Anne coming back, I’ll lock the door; but I don’t think she’ll be here yet.”

The Anarchist did as she told him with the utmost docility. He drank two cups of tea and huddled over the fire and coughed his dreadful graveyard cough. In time the warmth and Mrs. Crewe’s ministrations revived him a little. Presently the door-bell rang, and Mr. Zagadin got into a fluster and put on his boots, though they were not dry, and in spite of Mrs. Crewe’s assurance that Anne always let herself in with a latch-key.

It was a telegram from Anne to say she had been detained and would not be back till seven. When Mrs. Crewe read this message aloud Mr. Zagadin turned as white as a sheet.

“But I must see her — I must!” he said wildly. “Where is she? I will go to her!” and he staggered to his feet.

Mrs. Crewe thought he had gone mad — more mad than usual. “I have no idea where she is,” she replied; “her editor sends her here and there at a moment’s notice. You know how it is.”

He sank back in his chair and looked at Mrs. Crewe. "Then I must trust to you," he said.

"Yes — do," said Mrs. Crewe. She thought she understood. He had come to his last penny and wanted to borrow. Perhaps Anne owed him money for the Russian lessons. Anyhow, Mrs. Crewe was quite prepared to give him one of the two sovereigns then in her purse. He looked as if he had been starving for days.

But when he spoke again he did not ask for money.

"It has come!" he said in a deep, tragic voice.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Crewe inadequately. She still felt puzzled, but the sadness of his eyes began to affect the kind, dense old lady. They seemed to draw her with them to see what they saw — a ghastly real thing that waited for him.

"I go back to-night," he continued, in the same deep, hopeless voice. "I leave Liverpool Street at half-past eight. Don't forget — Liverpool Street at half-past eight!"

"I won't forget," said Mrs. Crewe. "Is that what you want me to tell Anne?"

"Yes. I hope she will be in time. I hope she will come."

Mrs. Crewe started.

"What?" she cried.

"I want your daughter to go with me."

"Go — with — you? To Russia?"

"Yes. Tell her so. I think she will come. The danger is great — I do not hide it — but the glory is great too. If we succeed, the world will tremble. If we fail — we die." And he shrugged his shoulders.

"But I don't want Anne to die," said Mrs. Crewe. "Besides, I can't spare her."

"Well — perhaps we should not die. It is never certain. Perhaps we should go to Siberia or Saghalien. There, too, there is a great work to do. How can you grudge one life when it may sow the seeds of freedom in a thousand minds? Your daughter has great gifts. I will lead her where she can employ them."

"I think she employs them very well in London," said Mrs. Crewe. "I am quite satisfied, and I believe she is."

"How can you be satisfied when millions of your fellow-creatures are miserable slaves? I want to give your daughter to Russia. Do you grudge one woman's life to a whole country?"

Mrs. Crewe did, most decidedly, but she thought it was useless to say so. She felt a little afraid of Mr. Zagadin this afternoon. The shadow of his sinister creed had fallen on his face; his eyes were restless and terror-stricken.

"Even if Anne wished to marry you ——" she began, but he interrupted her quite fiercely.

"Who speaks of marriage?" he asked.

Mrs. Crewe stared at him uncomprehendingly.

"You don't suppose my daughter could travel about with you unless she was your wife," she said; "it is not the English custom."

The nervous twitch that came with his smile was worse than ever to-day, and Mrs. Crewe looked past him in order not to see it.

"I speak of martyrdom and you speak of English custom," he said. "Give me a pen and paper. I will write to your daughter."

He sat down and wrote at great speed for about five minutes.

"Shall you start to-night—in any case?" asked Mrs. Crewe when he got up; because, of course, she had been making up her mind to withhold the letter for a few hours, and wondering at his simplicity in expecting her to deliver it.

"If the world were tottering to its end, I should start," he answered.

Mrs. Crewe felt very glad to hear it, and then she began to wonder what the poor man's fate would be, and even whether he would ever reach his journey's end.

"Do take care of yourself," she said. "Have you a warm wrap for the journey?"

"I have not. Tell your daughter to bring some. What is mine is hers."

"But really," urged Mrs. Crewe, "you must not expect my daughter. It is preposterous."

"I do expect her," said Mr. Zagadin. "She is a

noble woman — formed for heroic deeds — not for the petty, comfortable life in which you would enslave her. She shall be a Charlotte Corday and kill tyrants. A man may face anything, even what I face, with her by his side. My body is weak, even my spirit fails me. I look to her for courage."

His cough suddenly shook him, and he could say no more. When the fit abated he offered Mrs. Crewe his hand, but he did not offer her the letter.

"Good-bye," he said.

She went with him to the door.

"Perhaps you will soon come back to England," she said, with a wish to cheer him up a little.

"I go to a work from which no man comes back," he answered.

"But it is horrible," she exclaimed, "and you so ill, too. Can't you throw the whole thing up, and stay here, and let your friends look after you? Who forces you to go?"

He shook his head mournfully, and walked towards the head of the stairs.

"You have not left the letter," Mrs. Crewe called after him.

"I shall leave it with the hall-porter," he said.

Mrs. Crewe returned to the sitting-room. It was nearly half-past six now, and Anne might return at any moment. What would she do? Would she say the danger was visionary, and Mr. Zagadin's need of her real? Would she say she could keep herself out of

danger, and him, too? Mrs. Crewe could not feel sure. There is no delusion too silly for a woman inclined to throw herself away. The deeper the precipice the more irresistible the fascination.

Mrs. Crewe put on her outdoor things and went downstairs. She peeped into the porter's office, and saw Mr. Zagadin's letter lying on the table. The porter was not there. If he had been she could have easily given him a sixpence, and asked him to go upstairs and make sure that she had shut the door of the flat. But fortune favoured her, and she was not driven to practise this deception. She stepped across the threshold and snatched the letter, and fled into the street. Her heart beat, and her knees trembled, and she knew what it means to see suspicion in every eye, and to hear pursuit in every footstep. But she was quite resolved to wander about for two hours. When you have nowhere to go, and nothing to do, and are not inclined to look about you, two hours in the London streets will pass like time in prison. It seemed to Mrs. Crewe that all the clocks had stopped, and that every road had shrunk in length. She spent a quarter of an hour in a baker's shop eating buns she did not want; she went a little journey by the Underground; she tried the inside of a bus, and the outside of a tram. London had certainly dwindled that night. She could not get far enough away. But she would not go back to St. George's Mansions until half-past eight.

As she slowly mounted the four flights of steps to

Anne's flat, she took the letter out of her pocket and held it ready in her hand. Anne opened the door.

"Mother!" she exclaimed. "I have been very uneasy about you. Where have you been? And Tompkins is in a state about a letter he says Mr. Zagadin left with him for me. Is that in your hand? How did you get it?"

"I stole it," said Mrs. Crewe, giving it to her daughter.

Anne looked anxiously at her mother, who was haggard with fatigue and anxiety. She led her into the sitting-room, and then opened Mr. Zagadin's letter.

"Liverpool Street, at half-past eight," she said, and Mrs. Crewe saw her glance at the clock; "and he wants me to go with him to Russia. But it is half-past eight now! Oh, mother, what have you done?"

"He wanted you to be a martyr, Anne," said Mrs. Crewe, almost tearfully. "I really could not allow it. Besides, he doesn't even ask you to marry him, does he?"

"It comes to the same thing," said Anne, glancing distractedly at the clock again. "Of course, a man of Mr. Zagadin's opinions doesn't think anything of a church ceremony."

"Then we certainly cannot think of him as a member of the family," said Mrs. Crewe.

Anne sat down, and read her letter again.

"No one needs me as he does," she said, with both indecision and anguish in her tone. "Poor fellow!"

"Oh, Anne," exclaimed her mother, "surely you would not have gone! It would have broken my heart."

"But I might have wished him good-bye — might have taken him things for the journey. He is as unpractical and as unfit to take care of himself as a child. You ought not to have withheld his letter, mother. Where have you been all this time?"

"I really don't know where I have been," said Mrs. Crewe; "all over London, I think. I can't understand you, Anne. Surely you don't want to turn your back on your work and your people to go and blow up poor harmless Russians with dynamite! He calls it martyrdom; but you haven't been to Siberia and lost your senses."

"Oh! I never think of that side of him," interrupted Anne rather impatiently. "I think of his cleverness — and his cough. I daresay I could have kept myself out of harm's way, and him too."

"But in his own country he is considered a criminal. If they catch him they'll put him in prison. No doubt, if he had a wife they'd imprison her too, and send her to Siberia. They're not very particular out there."

"Well — it is all over," said Anne after a long pause.

"But if he writes — if he asks you to join him?"

"He says in his letter he won't do that."

"But if he did — you would not go?"

"I suppose not," said Anne; "but I wish I had bidden him good-bye."

For a long time neither mother nor child spoke again, and they both thought of Mr. Zagadin speeding towards Harwich, ill and disappointed, and very poor.

"I wish I had given him my railway rug," said Mrs. Crewe.

"I shall have to write and tell him I didn't get his letter till it was too late," said Anne. "I needn't say how it happened."

"I've no doubt he thinks us very unkind," said Mrs. Crewe, whose eyes looked tearful. "I hope it isn't wrong to be so fond of an Anarchist."

But Mrs. Crewe never repented the theft of the letter; and when she told Alice about it, the latter seemed to think her mother had acted as rightly as any one does who saves a fellow-creature from unnecessary suicide.

"There is no knowing," she said; "Anne might have gone out of sheer pity."

A month later Mrs. Crewe heard from Anne that poor Mr. Zagadin had neither done the awful deeds nor suffered the awful vengeance he expected, because he had been arrested the moment he had set foot on Russian soil. In prison, he fell ill of pneumonia, and died within the week. The news made Mrs. Crewe feel quite conscience-stricken. If she had given him her railway rug perhaps he could have taken it to prison with him and kept warm. Even his death did not make her wish for a moment that she had given him Anne.

Later still she told the story to one or two of her Burnside friends, and they also said she had acted wisely, though they added that it seemed a pity Anne should die an old maid. Mrs. Crewe replied that she used to be of the same opinion, but that since her visit to London she considered her elder daughter's single life a greater success in every way than her younger daughter's married one.

Nevertheless it gave her great pleasure to tell them, about a year after Mr. Zagadin's death, that Anne was going to marry her editor, and would give up her flat for a house in Chelsea Square.

"I hope he is a Conservative editor," said Burnside, "then we will try to forget that Anne nearly ran off with an Anarchist."

“THE LAST STRAW”

MISS BRUNTON often said that she had no patience with women who allowed other people to put upon them. A woman, she protested, should be a person of sense and spirit, not a poor, yielding reed swayed by every breeze. Her sister, Mrs. Simpson, used to take a remark of this kind to herself, and retort that a woman who had only herself to think of could easily keep up her courage. A spinster earning a comfortable livelihood did not know how hardly life pressed on the mother of a family. Miss Brunton never argued the point, because she knew that you might as well try to write on water as on Aggy's mind. But her eyes had a twinkle in them when her sister compared their lots to her own disadvantage. She knew who was likely to wear out first.

For many years Miss Brunton had been an assistant mistress in the Blackport High School, which is a large and flourishing concern. Before coming to Blackport she had languished as a governess in private families, and every one considered that she greatly improved her position by getting a post in a High School. Besides, Aggy Brunton had married Professor Simpson of

Blackport College, and therefore lived in Blackport, and would be able to befriend her sister in many ways.

Miss Brunton was very glad to go and live near Aggy, but her reasons were not exactly those put forward by her friends when they congratulated her. Aggy had never been able to look after herself, or her husband, or her children; and Miss Brunton thought it would be easier to do her own work and lend her sister a helping hand if the work and the sister were near neighbours. At first she lived in Professor Simpson's house, and as long as this arrangement lasted she certainly found plenty to do there. A child was born every year to parents who were unthrifty, delicate, and poor. How Miss Brunton had the strength and the patience to be schoolmistress, nurse, and housekeeper day by day no one could understand. She often owned that she felt tired; sometimes her spirits flagged. But she would soon whip them up again. Melancholy, like other luxuries, was not for her. Aggy might sit by the fire and weep while the world ran away; but her sister felt the weight of the world on her shoulders, and meant to support it or die.

However, soon after the fifth child arrived, Miss Brunton had to turn out because, unless she slept in a cupboard, the house would no longer hold her. She took small cheap lodgings close by, and Aggy said it would be nearly the same thing as having Susan with them; which was quite true as far as Aggy was con-

cerned. Her sister found the new arrangement rather more tiring than the old one.

Nevertheless Miss Brunton greatly enjoyed the snatches of solitude and leisure that were left to her. She had never before had a sitting-room of her own, or any chance of receiving her friends. Wherever she lived she made friends. That faculty of lending a helping hand did not exhaust itself on her sister, and it is one that usually wins goodwill. Besides she acted as a tonic on some of the nervous, overworked women who made the school wheels go round. Not all of them liked her, but those who did swore by her, clove to her, and when fate took them from her, would go far and wide to see her again.

But Miss Brunton never had much time to give her friends. She was always meaning to turn over a new leaf and let Aggy shift for herself, and she was always finding that the possible moment had not arrived. If Aggy had been robust and very well-to-do, Miss Brunton might have left her sister to fight her own battles. But Professor Simpson had a limited income, and his children were sickly, and his wife was both sickly and incompetent. When Aggy sent in haste for her sister it was always because she had a headache, or a damaged child, or no nurse, or no cook; and when Miss Brunton reached the house she often found the family in real difficulties. It is true that Aggy usually brought them on herself, but there they were.

Of course, all married women know that a single

woman never has anything to do. Married women without children count as single in this respect. A spinster who maintains herself is a person of leisure compared with a rich man's wife who has a baby in the nursery. This is a great mystery, but every mother understands it. Mrs. Simpson used to talk with envy of her sister's tranquil life and even of her circumstances, which she said were really easier than her own. At any rate her husband and she could not afford a holiday in Switzerland, and when they wanted a new book they looked for it on Miss Brunton's table.

"My month in Switzerland has cost me eighteen pounds," said Miss Brunton. "I wonder how much you have spent at Filey."

"A great deal more than we meant to. We always do," said Mrs. Simpson with a sigh. She was a thin little woman with a drab skin and colourless scanty hair. "Do you spend all you make?" she continued. "Do you never think of providing for your old age?"

"Of course I do," said Miss Brunton briskly. "Who would if I did not, pray?"

Mrs. Simpson's friends were under the impression that she suffered a good deal from her sister's quick temper. She looked slightly injured now and said—

"It must be so easy for you to save, living in these two little rooms, and only yourself to think of. Have you put by much?"

"About two hundred pounds."

A weaker woman might have tried to conceal this fact, but Miss Brunton felt quite sure that she could take care of herself and her money.

Aggy's prominent light eyes opened widely.

“Two hundred pounds! I wish I had a quarter of it.”

“Don't be so silly, Aggy,” said Miss Brunton sharply. “If I was knocked out of my work to-morrow I should have about eight pounds a year to live on.”

“Archibald says he can't afford to buy me a new winter jacket,” continued Aggy. “I can't get my sleeves into my old one. I wish you would lend me a little money, Susan.”

“Certainly not,” said Susan at once.

The Simpsons ought not to have been for ever short of money. Archibald had three hundred a year of his own, and his professorship brought him an income of at least five hundred. Most of his colleagues considered him a man of means. He certainly might have made two ends meet in Blackport, where folks do their washing at home, and get a respectable little house for fifty pounds a year. The Simpsons were not even in the uncomfortable position of knowing a great many people much richer than themselves. The staff of Blackport College supplied them with friends — men who professed something or lectured on something, and earned very little by it. The women-folk connected with such men are not fine birds; they have no money

for feathers. Mrs. Simpson could have been as well dressed as her acquaintances without any undue strain on her husband's purse.

But the skilful management of an income is really more important than its figure. Mrs. Simpson muddled away her money as she muddled away her time and her health; and of course her husband and children suffered for her sins. She was one of those incompetent, helpless creatures who at eighteen possess a pretty complexion and an amiable, vacant smile. They always marry and have families, and make every one belonging to them uncomfortable, and why men choose them for wives and mothers men alone can say. Poor Professor Simpson had twelve years in which to repent of his folly, and then, in an epidemic of influenza, he went out of the game. It was after his death that Miss Brunton's real troubles began.

In future Aggy and her five children would have to live on three hundred a year, and she assured her sister it could not be done. Susan said, "Stuff and nonsense! it must be done." It was preposterous to talk; as if they had any alternative! How did Aggy propose to spend more than her income without getting into debt? Luckily, by the terms of her husband's will, she could not touch the capital. Aggy reminded her sister that twenty years ago she had taken a prize at school for flower-painting. Why should she not recall that lost art and give lessons in it to the young ladies of Blackport? Miss Brunton said it would be much bet-

ter for her sister to recall the little she knew about cooking and manage her house and children with the help of one servant.

“Susan means well,” said Aggy to her friends; “but of course she does not know what it is to have children and feel anxious to provide for them. I must be both father and mother to my darlings now, and I am not strong. Susan always had the constitution of a horse. She ought to have been a man.”

“Yes,” said her friends; “she would have made a very good man.”

Professor Simpson died just before Christmas, so Miss Brunton was able to spend the vacation in helping Aggy to recover and remove. Aggy’s grief was very harrowing to those about her; she gave it such full expression. Even on the day of the funeral Miss Brunton felt inclined to shake her because she would howl over the baby in his cradle directly he had been got to sleep. She wept at every meal for weeks, because the sight of Susan in dear Archibald’s chair made her miserable, and she wept at the bare mention of retrenchment, because she said her husband had always wished her to have everything she wanted. She seemed to blame her sister for supposing that three hundred a year would not go as far as eight.

With great difficulty Miss Brunton managed to get the Simpsons into a house they could reasonably afford: and then the day soon came when she confessed to her friends that she meant to live with her sister

again. None of them asked why. They understood that Aggy would get on a little better with most of Susan's income added to her own.

Perhaps Aggy did get on a little better than if Susan had led her own life and left her sister to shift for herself. It never occurred to Miss Brunton that she had any choice in the matter for longer than an angry moment. She regarded her near relatives much as we regard our own bodies. We regret their imperfections, but we do not try in this world to get away from them.

The new conditions would have been more bearable if Miss Brunton could have held the reins — managed the housekeeping and the family expenditure, as well as her work at school. But of course Aggy stood on her dignity and resented both advice and interference. She attributed all her troubles to fate, and not to her own want of sense and self-control. One afternoon Miss Brunton came back from school and found Oscar, a boy of five, badly scalded.

"How did it happen?" she asked.

"He pulled the kitchen kettle over himself," explained Aggy. "Sarah was down in the wash-house at the time."

"But where were you?"

"Paying calls."

"Why do you do that on a washing-day when Sarah cannot possibly look after the children?"

"I cannot give up my friends and my position,

Susan. I wish to keep both for my family. We must get a second servant.”

“We cannot afford it.”

“We must. It is very easy for you to talk — away all day in that big cheerful school, sitting on a platform and looking at a lot of well-behaved girls — you don’t know what it is to spend the morning with five children as naughty as mine.”

When night came Aggy asked her sister to sit up with Oscar.

“A sleepless night never seems to hurt you,” she said. “I am quite exhausted with the shock of finding him scalded.”

“I will take him this night, but not again to-morrow,” said Miss Brunton; “I can’t teach when I am dead tired. It would not be fair to the school.”

“Of course I shall come in now and then.”

“No, you won’t,” said Miss Brunton, “I shall lock the door.”

Aggy took offence at her sister’s manner, but she knew her to be a person of her word, so she went to bed and slept soundly. The next night Oscar slept and did not disturb his mother.

The fear of letting the wear and tear of her home life affect her work at school acted like a spur on Miss Brunton; kept her going when she might have flagged, and even drove her to resist encroachment. She never allowed any one to make her unpunctual, and when Easter came she set off for a short holiday, although

Mrs. Simpson showed that she thought it a selfish thing to do. In the end she wished she had not spent ten shillings on the journey, because, before she had been away forty-eight hours, she received a telegram to say that Rosie had inflammation of the lungs. Of course, Rosie's aunt had to pack her trunks and return post haste to Blackport.

"I can't refuse to go when they are in trouble," she said to her indignant holiday companion. "Aggy's troubles are of her own making, but they are terribly real. She took this child with her on the top of a tram last week in that bitter east wind. I told her it was folly, and she asked me what I knew about children."

When Miss Brunton got back to Blackport she found Rosie much better. In fact, the doctor had only feared inflammation of the lungs, and had managed to keep it off.

"You ought not to have sent for me," said Miss Brunton to her sister. "The child has not been seriously ill."

She wished afterwards that she had held her peace, because her rebuke sent Aggy into hysterics. Mrs. Simpson cried and laughed, and said she was worn out with nursing, and vowed she had neither asked nor expected her sister to come. She always kept her troubles to herself, and never again would she fly to Susan for sympathy in a sorrowful hour. Then she took a sleeping draught and went to bed, while Susan looked after Rosie and the other children.

The proper mission of women is, of course, to weave roses into the tangled threads of manly lives. But there are some women who never get a chance of performing the pretty task for which Nature, the poet says, designed them. On the contrary, their hands have to make the best of tangles just as hard and just as tiring as those that engage the attention of their masculine neighbours. Miss Brunton had succeeded to her brother-in-law's anxieties, but not to his position of authority in the house or to his income. Of course, you may say that the remedy lay in her own hands. She had only to harden her heart. But that is exactly what some people cannot do. Miss Brunton loved her nephews and nieces. They put their grimy little arms round her neck and came to her for help in their troubles. She wore herself out over the effort to keep them properly fed and clothed. She tried to make her sister put by a little money towards their education. But in this she never succeeded, and at the end of two years her own savings had diminished. The latest drain on her resources had been caused by a fire in the nursery. When she spoke of claiming restitution from the insurance company, Aggy said that the premium had not been paid since her husband's death. She had always had other things to do with her money. After this Miss Brunton felt that no discovery of extravagance or folly would be surprising. She wondered whether they would ever find themselves without a roof to their heads.

Even a tough constitution cannot stand incessant work and worry for very long. Professor Simpson had been dead for about two and a half years when Miss Brunton found that she must either rest or break down. So she told Aggy that she meant to spend the summer vacation in Switzerland.

"You are lucky," said Aggy. "Always off somewhere!"

Miss Brunton had not been out of Blackport since last summer, when she had taken the Simpsons to the Isle of Man, and nursed them through the measles there. She mentioned this fact to Aggy, but Aggy only wriggled away from it, and observed that the children and she would have to content themselves with Blackpool. Miss Brunton felt positive that her sister could not afford to go anywhere at all, but she gave great offence by saying so. Aggy asked how she could grudge the poor delicate children a fortnight at the seaside, when she was planning an expensive holiday on the Continent for herself.

Mrs. Simpson did not realise that her sister was near a collapse. All her life she had leaned on Susan, taken her strength for granted, reckoned she had no troubles because she did not parade them. She had not the sense or the sympathy to see that even to the strong natures there come moments of discouragement.

Aggy went to Blackpool early in the summer, about a month before the end of the term. Miss Brunton begged her to go later, and not take the elder children

away from school, but Mrs. Simpson observed that she had to study economy. Lodgings were cheap in June.

“You have bought a great many new clothes,” said Susan, as she helped to pack. “I hope they are paid for!”

“They are,” said Mrs. Simpson shortly.

“I can’t understand it,” persisted Susan. “Last month you said you could not pay your bills until this month’s cheque had come, and now you have settled with the tradespeople and replenished the family wardrobe. Have you enough in your purse for your railway fares? And how are you going to pay your expenses at Blackpool?”

“Oh, don’t poke and pry into my affairs!” said Aggy impatiently. “The children would die without a change of air, and we can’t go about like Red Indians, in ragged blankets.”

Miss Brunton did not feel reassured, but she could do nothing to stop the expedition. For a day or two she enjoyed the silent, empty house, and then she suddenly began to hate it. The deserted rooms oppressed her, the lonely meals choked her. For the first time in her life she failed to outstep the blue devils always at her heels. She began to dwell on the future — and Heaven help the woman without mate or money who does that! She began to think that she could not afford the journey to Switzerland. It would make a hole in the hundred pounds left of her savings — the only shield in case of emergency between her and destitu-

tion. Then a solemn word of warning from the great doctor she had consulted left her no choice. She promised him to go. After that she felt more cheerful, and made her plans. She was to start the very day school closed, soon after the Simpsons came back from Blackpool.

The children looked rosy and sunburnt, but Aggy looked worried. Perhaps if Miss Brunton had been as wide awake as usual, she would have guessed that her sister had something on her mind. But just at the end of term a week of great heat tried her to the utmost, and she had no strength or vision for any one's business but her own.

At last speech-day arrived, and when the necessary festivities came to an end Miss Brunton walked home numb and dull with weariness. She felt too tired to travel, too tired to live. The little street seemed to pant beneath the sweltering sun; every window was set open and some front doors were ajar. It was quieter than usual, as if the heat had made the inmates idle and drowsy. But when Miss Brunton approached her sister's house, alarming and familiar sounds reached her from one of the open upper windows—the uncontrolled sobs of a woman nearly in hysterics. For a moment Miss Brunton paused, inclined to run away. But habit proved too strong for her; she could not turn her back on a difficulty. She opened the door with her latchkey, and walked upstairs and into the front bedroom. There lay Aggy, crying, and laugh-

ing, and raving incoherently, while a frightened maid-servant stood near with a bottle of smelling salts. Miss Brunton sent the girl out of the room, locked the door, and sat down. She knew that Aggy's hysterics soon came to an end if no one tried to coax her out of them. In a few minutes Mrs. Simpson got off the bed and came to the window where her sister had taken a chair.

“ Good-bye ! ” she said with a sob.

Miss Brunton did not answer.

Aggy next went to her wardrobe and put on a hat and cloak. When she stood at the glass Miss Brunton went to the door and put the key in her pocket. Then she sat down again. She was too tired to talk, and she knew she would soon hear all about it. When Aggy found the door locked she pulled it noisily to and fro, and beat on it with her fists, and sobbed to her sister to come and open it at once. So Miss Brunton seized her wrists, and dragged her back to the window and made her sit down. The tussle was exhausting, but successful.

“ Let me go,” howled Aggy; “ I want to drown myself.”

“ Sit still and don't behave like an idiot,” said Miss Brunton. “ The neighbours will hear you if you make such a row.”

“ I don't care who hears me ! I shall be dead in an hour, and then you'll be sorry. Give me the key this moment, Susan ! ”

Miss Brunton sat still and waited until her sister sulkily left off crying; then she said —

"I want my tea, Aggy. Are you going to tell me what's the matter?"

"I don't know why I should! You can't do anything! Read that!"

Miss Brunton took the crumpled letter her sister held out, and as she read it her face turned wan and old. The letter said that unless Mrs. Simpson paid the hundred and forty pounds she had borrowed within forty-eight hours, the usual proceedings would be taken. In due course she must expect her furniture to be seized and sold in discharge of the debt.

"You have been borrowing money," said Miss Brunton. She showed no surprise, and her manner was heavy and hopeless rather than angry. Yet Aggy felt afraid.

"I had to," she protested. "I can't let my children starve! It is impossible for an unmarried woman to understand what a mother ——"

Miss Brunton put up her hand to stem the torrent of words.

"Who writes? Where did you get the money?" she asked.

"I saw an advertisement in the *Herald*. His letters were most considerate at first. He said he did it to help people — especially ladies — and that he wanted no security. And now he is going to turn us into the streets; and the trustees will let him do it."

“How much do you owe?”

Miss Brunton looked at the letter as she asked the question, and noted again that a hundred and forty pounds was the sum mentioned there.

“I had a hundred pounds at Christmas,” said Aggy, beginning to sob again, and speaking with angry resentment; “I have paid him about twenty pounds as interest on it; and just before I went to Blackpool I had another forty. I couldn’t help it! You needn’t look at me like that, Susan! Give me the letter, and leave me to manage my own affairs. Only, before you start for Switzerland, tell me where I am to send your things. I suppose they won’t be sold up with mine!”

Miss Brunton got up.

“I must pay it,” she said. “I have the cheque for my salary in my pocket and a hundred pounds at the bank. You can’t be left in a house without furniture. Besides — the disgrace ——”

Miss Brunton broke off abruptly, and with a nervous twitch of her lips. Aggy cried, and said that in future she would let all the children die rather than borrow money to keep them alive. She followed her sister downstairs and poured out two cups of tea.

“I will go and see Mr. Taylor at once,” said Miss Brunton when she had drunk the tea but not eaten anything with it. She found that food choked her. “He must manage this business for us or we may be still more swindled.”

Mr. Taylor had always acted as Professor Simpson's solicitor

"It is not very pleasant to let other people know of one's private affairs," objected Aggy.

"When you have made a mess of them it is often necessary."

"I'm sure I'm sorry you have to go out again," said Aggy, who had gone back already to her usual injured tone. "What time do you start to-morrow? Can I pack for you?"

Miss Brunton turned on her.

"Where do you think I should get the money now? From your money-lender?"

"Oh!" whimpered Aggy, "can't you go?"

"Of course not."

"I wish I had never told you. I wish you had let me drown myself. It would have been much better."

"I daresay it would," said Miss Brunton impatiently, and she shut the door very quietly as she went out of the house, because she longed to bang it.

She saw Mr. Taylor's managing clerk and gave him her instructions, and she came away possessing nothing in the world but a couple of pounds in her purse, which would have to last her until her salary fell due again. Perhaps if Mr. Taylor himself had seen her he would have made some different arrangement; but his clerk merely heard what she had to say, and promised to have the matter attended to at once. It never occurred to Miss Brunton that she could borrow the money. Per-

haps it would not have been easy, but at any rate she did not think of it. She had never borrowed a penny in her life.

As she left the office her head swam and her knees trembled. She clung to the railings and looked fearfully up and down the street lest any one should see her and speak to her. She felt bewildered and exhausted, so that she could not think of the morrow or question the wisdom of what she had just done. But her courage had come to an end for the time. She had fought a good fight, and now she thought with desire of rest. She walked slowly on, her eyes on the ground, her memory throwing up odd transient flashes from bygone days; broken pictures of hours that had been neither important nor especially happy; other pictures graven on her mind in the decisive moments of life. As long as the streets were quiet she remained in this half-stupefied condition; but presently she had to walk through the noisiest street in Blackport, and there the traffic jarred cruelly on her irritable nerves. She hurried on, but the street was a long one, and she could not escape directly. One heavy lorry seemed to pursue her. It stopped when she stopped, and came after her when she ran on. At last she could bear it no longer, and she made a rush across the crowded road. She heard shouts, stared around, and suddenly felt afraid to go on. Something hit her violently in the chest —

.

Aggy sat beside her looking very white and tearful. There were screens round the bed, but she could see by the ceiling that she lay in a large room.

"It's all right about the money," she said. It was a great effort to speak, and she did not hear Aggy's answer, because she lost consciousness again. Next time she opened her eyes she saw a doctor and a nurse as well as Aggy. She looked at her sister with mild surprise, and wondered why the tears streamed down her poor, weak, little face.

"I suppose I am dying," she thought.

"Oh! Susan," cried Aggy, "I wish there was something I could do for you. I wish I had not let you go out again when you were so tired."

Susan's eyes stared dreamily at her sister.

"I'm all right," she whispered; "the doctor said I only wanted rest. I'm going to get it."

She shut her eyes and they waited. Presently she opened them once more.

"You go and look after the children," she said to Aggy.

Then she died.

A SENSIBLE WOMAN

MY friends say that poor Captain Ellison has gone to the devil. I know that this is not a pretty phrase for a lady to repeat, but I feel strongly on the subject, because they say that I helped him there. This I steadfastly deny.

I am very rich. I am not married. On an average I get one proposal a week. I do not mean that I receive an offer every Saturday with the *Athenæum* and the *Illustrated London News*. But on looking back at last year's crop I can count up nearly fifty men who made a bid for my money. I am systematic, and so I always put down their names in a pocket-book. Don Juan's conquests were few and far between compared to mine. They generally say they love me. Some of them say so when we have waltzed once round the room together. I do not waltz well. Others show more caution, and wait until we have been acquainted at least three days. I have had proposals by post from persons I have never seen. Therefore if I die unwed it will not be for want of opportunities to change my state. The truth is that the kind of man I should like to marry does not run and gather me to his heart.

I would have said "Yes" to Geraint. I have looked out for Le Maitre de Forges. Petruchio is my favourite hero in fiction. Do you begin to understand what kind of man I admire? I often think that I ought to have been born two hundred years ago, when women still considered men their masters. Even if I had been early Victorian I might have knelt at some one's feet and called him my lord and my love. How nice it sounds!

It is a great misfortune to have a plain person and a romantic mind. Behaviour, like bonnets, must be chosen to suit one's features, and for a stout girl with no complexion to carry on like a beauty would be ridiculous. I should wish to be wooed by a man I could worship. But on the one occasion when this came to pass I had to neglect the rites for which my heart hungered and behave like a sensible woman. Men always tell me I am a sensible woman, and I do not consider this a proof of insight on their part. When they propose they nearly always mention that they do not call for looks.

Captain Ellison said something of the kind when he proposed to me, but though I felt annoyed I accepted him. I saw that he was fond of me in a friendly fashion, and at the time I thought that might serve. I loved him in the other fashion, which I suppose is not sensible. His uncle, old General Ellison, pushed him to my feet. He invited us together to his house, and then showed his tactics at once.

I did not object. An unmarried woman with fifty thousand a year gets hardened to pursuit, and I have never found that what is called "tact" on the part of the hounds deceives the hare.

So we were engaged; and for a little while I lived in a fool's paradise. I wish I could have stayed there. However, if one must be turned out, I suppose it is better done before marriage than after. I am glad, on the whole, that Captain Ellison came to stay at Lenham Court, my country home.

As I have no parents, and am not thirty, my friends consider that I am bound to provide myself with a chaperon. I find this a great trial. The first one left because I objected to the frequent visits of her son, who drank more than was good for him, and proposed to me five times. The second married the curate, a widower with a large family and bills. The third was Mrs. Augustus Fazackery.

If you advertised for a lady companion and got a reply in an old-fashioned angular hand from some one who said she was a widow, and who signed herself "Matilda Fazackery," what sort of person would you expect? I did not even ask her age or express a desire to see her photograph. She wrote from somewhere in the north of Ireland, and gave me references to the wife of an Irish baronet and to the wife of an English dean. Both ladies said that they had the highest opinion of Mrs. Fazackery. So I have, in spite of what has happened. But if any one asked me in a

general way what she was like, I think I should mention that she was only twenty-two and very pretty.

I shall never forget the shock of my first meeting with her. I went into the hall when I heard the carriage arrive, and now that it was too late I considered how silly I had been not to get some impression of Matilda Fazackery's personal appearance. The baronet's wife had said she was a lady, the dean's wife had said she was a Christian, but they might have said these things of some one who squinted or went about with her face tied up. When your looking-glass gives you pain it is really important that the other faces in your view should give you pleasure. I hoped that my new companion would be a cheerful, dignified woman of middle age.

I am afraid that the first thing I said to Mrs. Fazackery startled her, but I could not help it. She ran up the hall-steps to meet me, and as the full light fell on her I cried —

“Great Scott, child, who are you?”

She looked quite taken aback.

“I am Matilda Fazackery,” she said. “I can send Mickey away if you don't like him.”

I guessed that she referred to a huge Persian kitten in her arms.

“Have you brought any other animals?” I asked.

“Only a tortoise,” she said.

I nearly replied that she ought to have brought a nurse, but I did not want to hurt her feelings.

I suppose I have a tell-tale countenance, because after staring at each other rather awkwardly she said —

“I hope I shall suit you. Perhaps you think I don’t look old enough?”

I have great self-control, and I consider that I showed it on that occasion. I did not tell her she would not suit me at all. I did not even smile. By the time we had finished dinner I had discovered that at any rate it was a pleasure to look at her.

The next few weeks we spent in London buying clothes for ourselves. I did not send her away after all. There really seemed nowhere to send her to when I came to inquire more closely into her affairs. Besides, Mickey got a cold, and when I saw how tenderly she nursed him I thought she might do as much for me some day if I won her affection. The tortoise stayed behind at Lenham Court.

I really could not call her “Mrs. Fazackery,” and I am not fond of “Matilda,” so one day when we were both feeding Mickey with beef-tea I asked her whether she liked the name of Una. She said she had never heard it. I was not surprised, because only the day before she had asked me whether “The Corsican Brothers” was by Shakespeare. She did not care for reading.

However, she said I might call her what I pleased.

That evening I tried to tell her the story of Una and her lion, but she did not seem much interested, and we were interrupted by a message from the stables. I forget what it was now, though I remember that she ran off at once to see some sick animal. I never knew any one so unromantic, but with proper training she would have made a first-rate vet. And, after all, I never got used to "Una." She said she had been called Tilly at home, and she seemed to think that name did as well as another. So Tilly she became to me.

When she had lived with me for some months I went to stay with the Ellisons, and got engaged to their nephew. I told Gerald a good deal about my new companion, and he said he would like to see her. Perhaps when we were married she might suit his maiden aunt, who was old and cross, and liked some one bright about her. I said so did I, and that I would as lief turn sunshine from my doors as Tilly and her Mickey. I told him that it was possible to get very fond of a pretty girl in three months. Gerald said that when we were married I should have a companion, and that a young married couple ought to live by themselves. Somehow, even when I was engaged to him, I never could think of myself as one of a young married couple. I don't believe I looked young when I was born. I asked him to remember that he would often be smoking and shooting, and getting about out of doors on a hunter. I have never

taken the least interest in sport myself. I once tried to sit on a horse and failed; so I never tried again. I hate making a fool of myself.

Of course, I had to give in about poor Tilly. Gerald did not treat me at all like a doll or a dickey-bird. If he had, I am sure I should have enjoyed it. His way was to take for granted that a sensible woman would agree with him; and he always persisted until I did agree. However, I said that I would not tell Tilly her fate just yet. In fact, I persuaded Gerald to come and make her acquaintance first, because I thought that when he saw what a pretty chirpy creature she was, he might change his mind about turning her adrift.

He came at Easter, and at his request I asked no one to meet him. He said he wished to get to know me better before our marriage in June. Tilly was not at home when he arrived, so he and I had tea together in my favourite corner of the hall. We were soon busy making plans. We always made plans, or talked of sensible subjects, and we never quarrelled. A courtship without quarrels is like a summer without showers.

My friends say that at this period of my life I behaved like an idiot. I can't see it. I could not guess that Captain Ellison would throw up everything for the sake of a pretty face. He must have seen a good many in his time, and yet he asked me to marry him. Anyhow, I could not have kept Tilly

out of his way. She danced in while we were at tea, her hands full of daffodils, and Mickey, as usual, trotting at her heels. She stopped short when she saw that one guest had come, and seemed ready to run away. But I did not let her.

A quarter of an hour later we had cleared a space on the floor, and were all three on our knees teaching Mickey and Captain Ellison's fox-terrier Toby to make friends. The fox-terrier barked, and Mickey spit and swore, and we laughed. I had never seen Gerald in such good spirits. I was afraid Toby would kill Mickey, but Gerald said that he was a most intelligent dog, and quite understood that Mickey must not be molested. To prove it he let him loose, and the next moment every one and everything seemed to scatter as if an explosion had taken place. Toby with a yelp had pounced on the cat. Mickey went off like fireworks in Tilly's hands. Gerald got hold of the dog. I started back and upset the tea-tray. I am sure there had never been such a noise in the house before.

At dinner we talked mainly about horses, and next morning at breakfast our fancy turned to dogs. These two people seemed to think animals more interesting than human beings, because when I invited them to drive to a rubbishy little dog-show in our county town they looked pleased, but when I mentioned that some of the neighbours were coming to dinner they showed no pleasure whatever; on the contrary.

I am inclined now to regret that I went to the dog-

show. It came on to rain heavily, and I caught a severe cold driving home. If I had known that I should spend most of the next week in my bedroom, I should probably have asked Gerald to go off somewhere. As it was, I told Tilly day by day that she must look after him. My friends say I ought to have known what would come of it. Friends are sometimes offensively plain-spoken.

I shall always believe that I owe my present forlorn condition to Mickey, and I bear no one else a grudge. One afternoon, when I had been upstairs nearly a week, I put on a tea-gown and went down. I thought I would give them a pleasant surprise, and appear in the hall for tea. To my alarm, when I got to the foot of the staircase I heard Tilly sobbing as if her heart would break. I also heard Gerald talking to her in a low, coaxing manner. I did not catch what he said, nor did I see them yet, because a large screen sheltered that part of the hall. But as I went towards it Toby slunk past me with the air of a criminal, and I had a presentiment of what had happened — at least of one event. I advanced a little farther, and then stopped short. Mickey lay stretched out on the hearth-rug; Tilly drooped over him and wept; Captain Ellison was trying to console her.

I still think he ought not to have addressed her as "darling" until he had come to an understanding with me; but I daresay he was a good deal agitated. It did not seem to soothe them to look up suddenly,

and see me. I felt uncomfortable, and I suppose I showed it. Tilly picked up her inanimate Mickey and bolted upstairs. I sat down and waited for Gerald to explain.

He began by saying I was a sensible woman, so I steeled myself to hear something disagreeable. He acknowledged that he had fallen in love with Tilly; but he said that he had not known it until Toby killed Mickey and made her cry. He did not know whether she cared for him; and he considered that he could not ask her unless I gave him permission to do so. He said that things should remain as they were if I thought it best.

He looked most dejected, and fiddled with his moustache.

I had taken his ring off my finger, and when he finished speaking I gave it back to him.

"It will have to be made smaller for Tilly," I said.

He stared and stammered, and then he looked indecently delighted. I had to laugh or to cry, so I laughed. Tears do not become me as they do Tilly. I laughed at his stupidity. I could see he thought I did not mind giving him up.

"Then it's all right?" he said, offering to shake hands.

I nodded, and he went off like a shot. I hear he tells every one I behaved like a brick. I am very glad he thinks so. My friends say I behaved like a fool. They were annoyed because I let Tilly stay

with me until Captain Ellison took her away ; but she had nowhere to go. General Ellison has not forgiven his nephew yet. He is one of those who say that Gerald has gone to the devil. I always reply that he seems very happy there ; and then they call me blasphemous.

Tilly is coming here in November to plant rose-trees on Mickey's grave. I have told her she may bring her husband if she likes.

AUNT THOMASINA

LAST night, at a dance, Mr. Simpson pretended not to know me. I believe that he speaks of me in terms that would wither me if they reached my ears. I am afraid I treated him rather badly. In fact, my husband says there was no excuse for me, and he advises me not to tell the story. But my husband never lived with Aunt Thomasina.

Mr. Tredennis asked me to marry him five years ago, when I was eighteen and he was twenty-two. I said "Yes," at once. Most girls would say "Yes" to Peter. Of course, he had no money. I only had Aunt Thomasina, and we agreed that we could not live on her. So he went to India to carve out a career. He left me his photograph and a diamond ring, which Aunt Thomasina would not let me wear. She did not recognise our engagement, because Peter had no money. We were not even allowed to correspond.

For five years I had to live on a week of memories, a ring, and a photograph which grew rather faded and shabby as time went on. The memories suffered a little, too. But the worst thing happened to the ring — I lost it.

In spite of Aunt Thomasina's prohibition, I had got into the way of wearing it on occasions when I particularly wished to remember Peter and my promise to him. Until I lost it I always had it on when any one made me an offer of marriage. Of course, I could not foresee exactly when an offer would be forthcoming; but as it happened, I watched its supporting sparkles when I went blackberrying with Captain Agincourt, when I met Betty Marsden's brother at Hurlingham, and when I danced every dance with Sir Dennis East at the Duchess of Stars' ball. I think that I must have dropped the ring in a blackberry-bush, because, though I mentioned Captain Agincourt first, in point of time he came just before Mr. Simpson.

On my twenty-third birthday, Aunt Thomasina said she could bear it no longer, and that I should marry the first man who asked me. I felt sure that, if she said so, I should. Therefore I reviewed my admirers more carefully than usual. I had not exactly forgotten Peter, but I had outgrown him. I don't know how else to describe the change that had taken place in me. From eighteen to twenty-three is a long time, at least twice as long as from thirty-eight to forty-three, for instance. Peter, dear boy, had become too young for me. When I looked at his photograph, I felt ready to be an elder sister to him. But I knew that he had seven already. I used to tell myself that he had grown older, but I never believed it. My Peter was twenty-two, and had rosy cheeks.

I rather liked Mr. Simpson before we were engaged. He was one of those chirpy little men who chatter about nothing and never hear what you say to them. I had so little to say to him that I thought this trait an advantage. Aunt Thomasina told him about my engagement to Peter. She called it a "childish entanglement," and Mr. Simpson professed himself quite satisfied. I tried to feel faithless and miserable, because I considered it due to Peter. But, as a matter of fact, I rather agreed with Aunt Thomasina, who said no one but a fool would feel bound to a man she had neither seen nor heard from for five mortal years. He had probably married long ago. Besides, I knew a great many young men of twenty-two, and, when one of them proposed to me, I talked to him like a mother, and told him to wait another ten years.

Aunt Thomasina approved of Mr. Simpson because he had a great deal of money. I had arrived at an age when money seems desirable, but it sometimes struck me that marriage with Mr. Simpson was a high price to pay for it. To be sure, he did not look young, like poor Peter's photograph, but he often looked silly. At least, I thought so after we were engaged.

One day he rushed into the drawing-room and said that he must go to Scotland for a week, because the recent gales had played havoc with his newly planted trees.

“‘It’s an ill wind that blows no one any good,’” said I.

“A week is a long time,” said he, fidgeting from one foot to the other on the hearthrug.

“It soon goes,” I sighed.

That night I looked at Peter’s photograph, and wondered whether we should ever meet again. I pictured the meeting. It should take place at a great reception. He should recognize that he had come back too late, and his heart should ache at the sight of my incomparable beauty. Because I did think he might have written now and then, just to keep my heart up, in spite of Aunt Thomasina’s prohibition. So I wanted his heart to ache. I wished my incomparable beauty had been a matter of fact. But what my imagination really boggled at was that tiresome little Mr. Simpson, who, under the circumstances, would be my husband. You can’t invent a really effective sentimental situation with a man like Mr. Simpson in the foreground. Besides, Aunt Thomasina has brought me up in a very old-fashioned way, and I felt sure that I should not philander with any one after marriage. That is partly why I did not look forward to it. As a girl, I have enjoyed many little episodes that do not concern Peter and Mr. Simpson. Captain Agincourt and I spent a very agreeable afternoon among the blackberry-bushes.

While Mr. Simpson was in Scotland we telegraphed to each other every day. He had proposed writing,

but I said that a correspondence by telegraph would be more of a joke. So he consented at once. The days flew, but each one helped to show me what I had half-known before. I really could not marry Mr. Simpson. I knew he would not easily believe it, because he had said to Aunt Thomasina that I was a lucky girl. The memory of this remark served to keep my mind firm when it threatened to give way and pretend that it would be easier to marry Mr. Simpson than to throw him over. But I quaked when I thought of Aunt Thomasina.

The day it all happened she had gone out. I was waiting in the drawing-room for Mr. Simpson, who had telegraphed that he would arrive about four. I looked forward to a painful interview, because about two hours ago I had despatched his ring and an explanatory letter to his rooms. I hoped he would take it quietly, and look out for another lucky girl at once. But I did not feel at all quiet myself, and, while I waited, I had a great deal of very unpleasant imaginary conversation. This grew so harrowing that I began to think of myself as Mrs. Simpson with comparative relief, when the butler opened the door and announced some one. I did not catch the name, and, when I turned round, I did not know the man who came towards me. At least I thought so.

"Lady Sandway is out," I began.

"Have you forgotten me, Monica?" said he.

Well, I had, and it was no wonder. I stared and

stared, and could not believe my eyes. But I knew his manner, though this, too, had greatly changed.

"Five years is a long time," I murmured.

"Is it too long?" he asked hastily. "Am I too late?"

"Why did you never write?"

"Because you forbade it."

"Oh! What a reason!"

He stood there and looked at me, and I looked at him. Dear Peter! How glad I was to see him again! Every moment I recognised something I used to know, and every moment I discovered that the boy had grown into a man.

"I wish you had never left me your photograph," I said.

"Am I too late, Monica? Don't keep me in suspense."

Mr. Simpson came in before I could speak. I introduced the two men to each other, and rang for tea. Until it came we talked of the recent gale, and, when we were left to ourselves, I started subjects of burning interest, one on the top of another.

"This is new," said Peter, at length; "I don't remember that you used to be keen about politics."

"I am Member for Shrimington," said Mr. Simpson, as if that explained it.

I said that my interest in politics was entirely due to Aunt Thomasina, who could not go to sleep after dinner unless I read the debates to her.

"I'm told I ought to go in for politics, myself," said Peter.

I put down the sugar-basin, and looked at him.

"Are you going to stay in England?" I exclaimed.

"Yes. Didn't you know? Polruan is dead, poor chap. I'm his heir."

"I thought Evans announced a strange name," said I. "Are you Lord Polruan now, then? *What* a difference it will make to Aunt Thomasina!"

"Are you related to Lady Sandway?" asked Mr. Simpson.

"Not yet," said Peter. Then he turned to me.

"You'd rather live in England than India?" he asked.

"Certainly," I answered; "but I have always wished to see India."

"Well, that's not impossible," whispered Mr. Simpson. "What about a wedding journey there?"

"Shall we?" said I to Peter, with an appealing glance.

"Oh, if you like," he replied. He has confessed since that he thought me rather forward.

"What have you done with your ring?" said Mr. Simpson suddenly. The one he had given me was very valuable, and I suppose he had just missed it from my hand.

"I daresay you have lost it," said Peter good-naturedly; and I knew he referred to the one of little

value that he had given me five years ago. I felt quite pleased to be able to answer straightforwardly.

"I have," I said, addressing him; "I'm afraid I dropped it in a blackberry-bush."

"Scissors!" said Mr. Simpson. He really said something much ruder that I should not think of repeating. I say "scissors" myself sometimes.

"Scissors!" said Mr. Simpson; "that ring cost two hundred pounds, and where do blackberry-bushes grow in Bruton Street?"

"Nonsense," said Peter, who by this time looked downright angry. He had very old-fashioned ideas, and did not like to hear a man use strong language in the presence of a lady. "The ring didn't cost twenty pounds. I wasn't worth two hundred when I bought it."

Mr. Simpson looked as if a new idea had just entered his head.

"Are you the 'childish entanglement'?" he inquired.

"Has that been your description of me, Monica?" said Peter.

I took my courage in my hands and turned to Mr. Simpson.

"I did not want to explain now—before Lord Polruan. I wrote to you this morning, and said what I had to say. The letter is at your rooms."

"But where is the ring?" he cried.

"In the letter," I said.

"Do you mean that you want to jilt me? You — a girl without a penny!"

I *knew* he would not behave well. Perhaps I did not deserve much at his hands, but, at the same time, many men would not have said the things he tried to say — until Peter stopped him. He would not believe that I had written to him before I saw Peter, or even knew that he had come back from India with a title and a fortune. He asked me whether Aunt Thomasina knew of the letter I had written to him, and I had to confess that she did not.

"Lady Sandway will agree with me that your behaviour is disgraceful," he said.

At that moment Lady Sandway entered the room. She went straight up to — Peter.

"My *dear* Lord Polruan," she cooed, "*what* a pleasure to see you again!"

"Do you know what has happened, Lady Sandway?" blurted out Mr. Simpson at once. "Your niece has thrown me over."

"Really!" said Aunt Thomasina. "Then ——"

Of course, she was a very worldly old lady, but I never supposed her worldliness would stand me in such good stead. She threw off Mr. Simpson like an old glove, just as she had once thrown off poor Peter. But she admitted later that she never could abide Mr. Simpson's manners.

"I have just seen Lady Caroline Cadbury," she

said, still standing, as if she expected Mr. Simpson to go at once.

“I shall propose to her to-night,” he said savagely.

I suppose he did, because next day she wrote to tell Aunt Thomasina that she had accepted him, and hoped I would forgive her, as it was a case of an irresistible attachment on both sides. I did not see Aunt Thomasina’s reply.

Peter maintains that I treated Mr. Simpson very badly. It is all very well; but if I had married Mr. Simpson, what would have become of Peter?

AN ICONOCLAST

The study at Admers, MR. BERENGER'S house in Surrey. A comfortable, but rather untidy room, with a great many books in it. A beautiful view from the windows. MR. BERENGER, the celebrated novelist, is at his writing-table. ROSE, his daughter, a very pretty girl of eighteen, stands near him, an open letter in her hand.

ROSE. She arrives by the 12.15. She will be here in five minutes. I can't help it, Dad! She *would* come.

MR. B. Bless me, child! Have you no will of your own?

ROSE. Plenty. But — they always say you invited them, and it's always true. You're so distressingly good-natured, Dad.

MR. B. I suppose I have my faults, like other people, but I'm not good-natured — not in your sense of the word, I mean.

ROSE. Oh! (*Takes up a letter from a pile on the table, some of which are not yet opened.*) The Vicar of Shrimpington would like some more free copies

of your last novel to sell at a bazaar. His church steeple is out of repair. Bless the Vicar of Shrimpington. (*Takes up other letters.*) Autograph-hunters. Only five to-day. Julia O'Connor would like a lock of your hair. (*Laughs.*) You've none to spare, Dad, have you?

MR. B. (*easily*). Give me some sheets of paper. If I can make people happier with so little trouble —

ROSE. It's all very well, but I have to write their silly addresses, and pay for the stamps out of my housekeeping money. If this new novel catches on like the last I shall want an increased allowance. Or I might sell your signatures at a shilling apiece.

MR. B. I daresay; and whenever I was having a quiet pipe you'd bring me a pen and paper.

ROSE. Oh no! I understand that even a novelist may be busy. (*Points to a stack of unopened manuscripts.*) I believe all the boys and girls in Great Britain ask you to read their manuscripts, and give them your honest opinion.

MR. B. (*groans*).

ROSE. And think of the abusive unstamped letters you get when you have given it!

MR. B. Some seem grateful.

ROSE (*sniffs and takes up an unopened letter*). I have just paid twopence for this one.

MR. B. (*reading aloud*). "Dear Sir, — Thank you for nothing. You have not read my novel, because I put a drop of gum between page 703 and 704, where

the Lady Yvonne defies the Marquis, and *it is still there*; so your advice that I want to study models of fine English is ridiculous, and when your next novel comes out, I shall look whether you have stolen my plot, and if you do I shall not spare you. Your last novel I consider very feeble. In fact you are going off, though no doubt the ring you lead will continue to roll you sky high in their well-known shameless manner. It is time all this was stopped and literature restored to hands who know how to use it. — Yours gratefully (ha-ha), “ROLAND DE BOHUN.”

Well, that's worth twopence, Rose.

ROSE. Oh, Dad, I wish you'd take things seriously!

MR. B. My dear child, you won't when you're as old as I am. You'll know that nothing matters very much or lasts very long — except the toothache.

ROSE. But your novels are very serious — very tragic.

MR. B. They're fiction. Real life is a joke if you take it the right way.

ROSE. Miss Mortlake is not a joke.

MR. B. (*sighs*). No.

ROSE. She is very serious — very tragic — like your novels.

MR. B. Oh, come, Rose, my novels are not as bad as all that!

ROSE. And she may matter very much, and she might stay very long.

MR. B. (*uneasily*). You're too suspicious, my dear.

ROSE. No wonder! Since I left school and you grew so famous, I've prevented at least six women from becoming my stepmother. (*Indignantly.*) I've no time to establish myself, Dad; you take so much looking after.

MR. B. When all's said and done, a man can't be married against his will.

ROSE. Oh! can't he?

MR. B. He must propose to the woman.

ROSE. Oh dear no, Dad. Where have you lived?

MR. B. (*looking at his watch*). I rather thought of taking lunch out to-day, on my bicycle. Anything will do...bread and cheese——

ROSE. That's no good, Dad. It only delays matters. To-day I'm here.

MR. B. But what can *you* do, my dear?

ROSE. I must think. (*Thinks.*)

[MR. B. *takes up* ROLAND DE BOHUN's letter again and chuckles over it. ROSE looks pensively at her father. A long silence, broken at last by MR. B.]

MR. B. Well, Rose?

ROSE. I have an idea. Miss Mortlake, as you know, is a flopper.

MR. B. A how much?

ROSE. A flopper...always on her knees to some one. Just now it's you. A little while ago it was Wilkins, the Minor Poet.

MR. B. Will you set up a new idol for her, then?

ROSE. No; I thought I'd pull down the old one — if you don't mind, Dad.

MR. B. My dear girl, you may shatter me in fragments if you please. Anything for a quiet life. There's the front door.

[*He gets up in a flurry and disappears through a low French window into the garden. The parlour-maid announces MISS MORTLAKE, an anæmic-looking young woman with very round prominent eyes, a restless manner, and untidy hair. She wears a shocking coat and skirt, a velveteen hat that has been out in the rain, and thick square-toed boots.*

MISS M. You got my letter, I hope, Miss Berenger. It is so *delightful* to come in this informal friendly way. When I met your father at the New Gallery last week we somehow began to talk about *pilgrimages*. You can't be a moment in Mr. Berenger's company without talking of something that ennobles the *soul*, can you?

ROSE. It's not my experience. I only see father at meals, and then he's usually growling at the food. It doesn't ennoble my soul. It annoys me. There was a beautiful steak-pie at breakfast this morning. The gravy was all jelly and —

MISS M. My *dear* Miss Berenger! I *can't* think of your father in connection with steak-pies and jelly. I *suppose* he eats and drinks like other people, though

one can hardly imagine the creator of "Maud Wyvern" doing anything but dream and write...and perhaps walk over his own hills...and perhaps read fine poetry.

ROSE. Father reads the *Daily Mail*, and *Punch*, and the *Sphere*...chiefly, and if he dreams I hear of it. He says his dinner has disagreed with him.

MISS M. (*shudders*). But, as I was telling you, your father spoke of Stratford-on-Avon, he spoke of Abbotsford, he spoke of Freshwater; and I said boldly, "All these may wait for me, Mr. Berenger. When I put on cockleshells and sandall'd shoon I shall go to Admers."

ROSE (*with her eyes on Miss M.'s boots*). And what did father say?

MISS M. He said you always had lunch at one, and might come any day by the 12.15. I've trodden on air ever since. Is this his study? (*In a sepulchral voice.*) Was it here that Maud Wyvern lived and died? Where does he sit? Where does he write? Let me sit in *his* chair.

ROSE. He sits there...with his feet on the mantelpiece.

MISS M. *How original.*

ROSE. It's expensive. That mantelpiece was painted white a month ago. You see the colour now. You won't find the chair comfortable. All the springs are broken. Dad weighs thirteen stone, you know. He'll have no figure left soon.

MISS M. (*looks startled, but recovers*). And do you sit here while he works and inspire him?

ROSE. Good gracious, no. If the housemaid knocks a broom against the door he swears, and if I go near him he throws things at me.

MISS M. !!!

ROSE. Yes; Dad's a fiendish temper. Of course, it isn't his fault, poor dear. It's the disease.

MISS M. What disease?

ROSE (*truthfully*). I can't tell you.

MISS M. Dear me! How sad.

ROSE. Oh! It won't kill him. I daresay I shall die first. (*Sighs.*) I have to order his dinners.

MISS M. (*to herself*). If there is a quality in men I hold in detestation it is greediness. A really spiritual man ought not to know what he is eating.

[*A gong is sounded, and ROSE leads the way into the dining-room, where MR. B. is waiting. It is a charming room and a well-ordered table.*]

MISS M. (*at the window*). What a view! I am sure I should be inspired myself if I sat and gazed at it. Do you look out of the window while you think, Mr. Berenger?

MR. B. I don't know. [*They sit down to lunch.*]

ROSE. I hope you have taken your dinner-pills, Dad.

MR. B. Dinner-pills! (*Catches her eye and shakes his head reprovably.*) Pass the claret to Miss Mortlake, Rose.

MISS M. I never *touch* wine, Mr. Berenger.

ROSE (*jumping up*). I'll mix your brandy and water for you, Dad. Dear me, Minton has forgotten the hot water. (*Rings.*)

MR. B. Thank you, Rose, I think I won't have it to-day.

ROSE. Oh! you'd better. You're so *used* to it, you know. (*Mixes a steaming glass and places it as near as she can to Miss M., who edges away from it in disgust.*)

MISS M. I met a great admirer of yours the other day, Mr. Beringer; such a *cultured* woman. She said she had read "Maud Wyvern" five times, and whenever she came to Maud's death she dissolved in tears. It is just what I do myself. Did you weep when you wrote it?

ROSE. I can answer that question. (MR. B. *looks surprised.*) Don't you remember, Dad? You came in to me — chortling. "That'll fetch 'em," you said. "That's good for fifty thousand." So it has been. I've had five new hats since Maud Wyvern died.

MR. B. Rose, your imagination runs away with you.

MISS M. *I really should not like to live in the house with that girl. I wonder if she is quite truthful. A fiendish temper and brandy and water for lunch. How unlike one's ideal!* (*Aloud.*) I have always fancied, Mr. Beringer, that in your portrait of Sir Guy Ferrers you drew largely on yourself.

(*Pause.*) He is assuredly the most dashing and chivalrous figure in modern fiction.

ROSE (*exploding*). Dad isn't dashing — not much. You should see him back-peddalling down our hills. I always have to wait for him at the bottom.

MR. B. (*severely*). Rose, your tongue runs away with you.

ROSE (*getting up and imprinting a wheedling little butterfly kiss on her father's forehead*). And your bike runs away with you, Dad, doesn't it? (*To Miss M.*) I had to help him out of a ditch once.

MISS M. (*in a tone of disgust*). Do you ride — er — ironmongery, Mr. Berenger?

[MR. B. *is about to reply, when a startling incident disturbs the conversation. A tennis-ball flies through the open window and hits Miss M. rather violently on the chin. It rebounds on the table and upsets several slender flower-glasses. Tumult and apologies. MR. B. goes off in search of the offenders.*

ROSE (*calmly*). That's Tommy. Last time he broke a decanter. I've three brothers, you know . . . demons.

MISS M. Indeed! I didn't know. I thought you were the only child, and when I saw you I said to myself, "Poor Mr. Berenger will be a very *lonely* man before long." Are there three boys *living in this house?*

ROSE. Yes. They go to school now, but before that I used to teach them.

MISS M. What anxious work!

ROSE. It chiefly consisted in chasing them up and down stairs. They play at being Red Indians, and you can hear their yells at the end of the garden.

MISS M. But how can your father write if you make such a noise?

ROSE. He can't. He waits till we're all in bed. He sits up half the night, and has breakfast any time. That's why he's so dyspeptic.

MISS M. Dyspeptic! The author of "Maud Weyvern" dyspeptic!

MR. B. (*returning*). Tommy is very much ashamed of himself, Miss Mortlake. The truth is, that the tennis-ball was really a tomahawk hurled by Red Eagle, the terror of the plains, and you can't expect an Indian chief in the heat of battle to look out for an open window. In future I have said that I will *not* have Red Indians this side of the yew-hedge. They are too careless.

MISS M. (*to herself*). *Then she does speak the truth. They do pretend to be Red Indians. What a very odd idea!*

ROSE (*getting up*). Shall we go into the drawing-room? I suppose you don't mind smoke, Miss Mortlake?

MISS M. I'm afraid I do, Miss Berenger. Even a cigarette gives me vertigo.

ROSE. How distressing! I hope stale smoke doesn't,

because all of our rooms smell of it. Dad has his pipe whenever he pleases.

MISS M. I never can understand why a man of refined habits should *want* to smoke. *I* don't.

ROSE. But you're not a man — of refined habits.

MISS M. It is so impossible to put a self-indulgent man on a pedestal.

ROSE. Well, if I were a man I'd prefer an easy-chair.

MISS M. But have you no high ideals? The man I worship must be heroic and austere.

ROSE. I suppose it's a matter of taste.

MISS M. It is so thrilling to look up and adore.

ROSE. I never tried it.

MISS M. So heart-breaking to see the idol fall.

ROSE. There is always the pedestal — and idols are cheap to-day.

MISS M. Ah! You have your father's mocking spirit — the spirit, I mean, of his wonderful, his incomparable books. It is odd that his conversation should be so — so —

ROSE. Flat. You see, Dad writes at night. He gets lively after supper.

MISS M. (*to herself*). Supper! What a household! What ways. (*Aloud.*) Does he — then — does he — drink brandy and water for supper?

ROSE. Rather.

MISS M. !!!

[MR. B. *comes into the drawing-room.* ROSE *gets*

up and goes out, saying something inarticulate about TOMMY'S dinner.

MISS M. When is the next train, Mr. Berenger?

MR. B. At 3.15. But the 4.20 is better. Won't you stay for that?

MISS M. No, thank you.

[The parlour-maid brings MR. B. a small package that has just come by the post.]

MR. B. Proofs! I think my new novel, "Flower o' the Quince," will be out in six weeks.

[MISS M. bows slightly and says nothing.]

MR. B. *(not noticing her manner yet)*. What do you think of the name?

MISS M. *(seriously)*. I am afraid that in future I shall feel very differently about the names of your novels *and* their contents.

MR. B. *(looking at her)*. Has your pilgrimage been so disappointing?

MISS M. I confess it has. I may seem rude, but I am *shattered*, and you must forgive me. Perhaps I am an idealist, Mr. Berenger. I did not expect to find you all so very — er — *real*.

MR. B. Oh! I admit our reality.

MISS M. You never told me you had three boys at home. Boys should be at school.

MR. B. *(rather shortly)*. My boys are delicate. They will be at home for years.

MISS M. I really cannot stand boys.

[MR. B. lifts his eyebrows.]

MISS M. Mr. Berenger, there is a scene in one of your novels that I admire—I mean that I did admire more than any scene in literature. (*She waits in vain for MR. B. to say something.*) It is when Maud Wyvern admits to Sir Guy Ferrers—though he is poor and she is rich——

MR. B. Yes. He is poor and she is rich.

MISS M. I have twenty thousand pounds, Mr. Berenger.

MR. B. I am delighted to hear it. But——

MISS M. (*shaking her head*). It is impossible, Mr. Berenger. All the way here I thought of that scene. All the way home I shall think of another.

MR. B. Indeed. (*To himself.*) Where can Rose be? I wish she'd come back.

MISS M. It is a scene in a novel of my own.

MR. B. I didn't know you wrote novels.

MISS M. I have written ten.

[MR. B. *looks surprised.*

MISS M. They are not published. My *friends* admire them, and that is enough for me. Some day, perhaps...I don't despise fame, but I am in no hurry for it. The novel I am thinking of is called "The Idol."

MR. B. (*quoting softly*). "Bloomin' idol made o' mud."

MISS M. When the heroine discovers that the hero falls short of her ideal, she dies of a broken heart... on the spot...in his arms.

MR. B. Poor fellow!

MISS M. (*her eyes very round*). And he never touches brandy again.

MR. B. (*stifling a yawn*). I should have thought he wanted some after that.

MISS M. My novels are not flippant, Mr. Berenger. They are like my life — purposeful and truly inward. And as my life is, so must my surroundings be. What I dream of is no doubt rare and difficult to attain. I want a companion whose lightest word carries a gospel, and whose every hour is devoted to the improvement of the soul; who climbs a little higher day by day, and lifts me higher too.

MR. B. Well, I hope you'll find him — her — Miss Mortlake.

MISS M. I have not found him yet. I thought I had. (*Suddenly.*) I'm afraid it's time to start if I am to catch the 3.15.

Enter ROSE, with flowers.

ROSE. I've gathered you some roses. They won't live long, but for a day they will remind you of Admers.

MISS M. Then I will leave them here. I wish to forget Admers. (*Marches out, leaving her astonished host and hostess staring at each other.*)

MR. B. Rose, you little minx, what have you been saying to her?

ROSE. I said you liked your dinner well cooked; so you do. I said the boys were noisy little demons;

so they are. I suppose I said a few other things. I've just given Tommy a shilling.

MR. B. What for?

ROSE. For the tennis-ball. It was a help.

MR. B. H'm. "I was adored once."

ROSE. I know she came down here intending to propose to you.

MR. B. (*with sudden severity*). Rose, do you listen at doors?

ROSE (*smothering her father with kisses*). I knew it, I knew it, Dad! No need to listen. What a mercy I was at home!

MR. B. (*tenderly*). Poor Miss Mortlake.

ROSE. Don't worry, Dad. She'll stick up some one else. I couldn't spare you for her pedestal. I want you all the time for my own.

A SKY SIGN

SCENE: *A sitting-room on a fourth floor flat in Kensington. Books, flowers, autotypes, copper jars, honeysuckle cretonne, a Persian carpet, comfortable chairs.*

FLORA HATHAWAY. I can't see it. Give up the man you care for because you think a married woman can't write as much for the magazines as a single one! I should let the magazines go to ——

STELLA BLOIS. You always caricature one's views, Flora. I have not said I care for Jack.

FLORA. Said! Hath not a friend eyes? You needn't get so red. If Captain Daresham worshipped the ground *I* trod on ——

STELLA. It's different for you, Flora. You're a darling, but you do nothing but dress and flirt and play the banjo. Now, you ought to marry.

FLORA. If you throw over Captain Daresham I shall consider him fair game. I have a new toque, with blue poppies — Aha! You don't like the idea. Thought you wouldn't.

STELLA. I have drudged and slaved and given up. I have worked early and late. At last success is

knocking at my door — such a gentle knock — perhaps only my ears hear it. But with each new effort it will come a little louder — if I think of nothing else —

FLORA. Sell yourself to the devil, like a mediæval bridge-builder. Well, if you think it's worth it. Seems to me utter nonsense, you know. If you marry Jack you get something out of life — affection and all that — I can't talk, but I'd like to have some one round as I get older who thinks I'm the only woman in the world. Must be kind of soothing when you begin to see wrinkles and grey hair. Put your ink-pot in your trunk, and write your rubbish on your honeymoon.

STELLA. You don't understand, sweetheart. You never understand. I want to write a great novel — an "Esmond," perhaps. I want to spend five years over it — build it word by word, step by step; die, for all I care, when it is finished.

FLORA. Oh, you goose! In five years you won't be as pretty as you are now. Good-bye.

STELLA. Jack is coming this afternoon to wish me many happy returns. I must be ready with my answer. It is not right to keep him on tenterhooks so long. I wish something would happen to drive me one way or the other. I wish there were sky signs to tell us what to do. Suppose I could see it written in great letters across the sky: "Stella Blois, give up marriage and go on with your work." Of course, it would only be visible to me.

FLORA. Yes; and directly you did see it you'd want to give up work and go on with marriage. Ta-ta!

STELLA. Are you going? Stay to tea.

FLORA. Is it likely?

[*She goes. STELLA sees her to the door, and then returns to the sitting-room. She stands still and looks round.*

STELLA. How pretty this room is! I can do just as I like here—lead the life that pleases me—see the friends I choose—spend my time and money as I will. Why should I desire any change? Do I desire any? I wish I knew!

[*She sits down and takes up a book, but does not open it. A little later, a maid-servant opens the door and shows in a tall, broad-shouldered young man, whom she announces as CAPTAIN DARESIAM.*

STELLA. Tea, Mary. How d'ye do, Jack?

CAPTAIN D. Many happy returns, Stella! How jolly this room always looks!

STELLA. It may well look jolly when you fill it with roses. Thank you so much for them.

[*MARY brings in tea. The china is old and delicate, the silver very bright. CAPTAIN DARESIAM sits down near the tea-table and watches STELLA make the tea. MARY goes.*

CAPTAIN D. What pretty hands you have, Stella!

STELLA (*absently*). Have I? Let me see. You do take sugar?—one of your old-fashioned ways.

CAPTAIN D. What are the others?

STELLA. Oh, everything! Not your ways, perhaps, but your ideas.

CAPTAIN D. Don't let's quarrel on your birthday. We always quarrel when we talk about my ideas.

STELLA. You must keep them out of sight, then.

CAPTAIN D. So I will — "all but one," as Hamlet says.

STELLA. Have you ever read "Hamlet"?

CAPTAIN D. Oh! if you're going to rag — Look here, Stella — stick to the point. You promised me an answer to-day.

STELLA (*sighing*). Ye-es.

CAPTAIN D. Is that the answer?

STELLA. No, certainly not. Don't jump at one like that, Jack. I nearly upset my tea. Sit down and keep cool, and let us talk sensibly.

CAPTAIN D. I'd rather talk foolishly. Sometimes I wish you were a bit more of a fool.

STELLA. If you wish me any different from what I am, we will give it up — because we should only make each other miserable.

CAPTAIN D. I'll risk it, if only you will.

STELLA. Yes, I know you're rash and easily carried away. Men are, poor things! I must look ahead for both of us. Now, for instance, if you have an idea that when once we are married you can *mould* me —

CAPTAIN D. Good heavens, Stella! you talk as if

you were a blanc-mange. I want you just as you are — have done for the last two years.

STELLA. You *said* you wished me more of a fool. What can that mean if not that you want to shape me in your own — your own —

CAPTAIN D. In my own image. Thank you, Stella. I asked for a plain answer, and I suppose I've got it.

STELLA. Why can't you keep your temper, as I do?

CAPTAIN D. Because you might have let me down more easily.

STELLA. I don't call it nice to say you'll go back to India to-morrow unless I marry you. Highwayman manners! Why can't we go on as we are?

CAPTAIN D. Because we can't. At least, I can't. I want a straight answer. I've waited a long time for one.

STELLA. Very well — No.

CAPTAIN D. (*getting up*). Do you mean that?

STELLA. When you look like that, I do.

CAPTAIN D. Good-bye, then.

STELLA. Are you going? Good-bye.

[*She averts her head and lets him go without shaking hands. The bang of a door is heard. She makes a little rush forward, and then stops short.*

STELLA. Gone! And now I can begin the novel. (*She sits down and stares at a bowl of roses.*) It will have to be a very great novel to make it worth while. I wonder when he will start for India? Surely he

will come and see me again first. If he didn't—I should have the novel—which is not begun.

[MARY comes in and removes the tea-things.

Then she returns.

MARY. If you please, m'm, can I go out for half-an-hour?

STELLA. Certainly.

[*She sits down at her writing-table and takes a note-book from a drawer. Presently the outside door bangs again.*

STELLA. It is much better so. Marriage would be very distracting. I believe that the wear and tear of ordering three meals a day for a man is quite incalculable. But I shall miss Jack. India is a long way off, and the climate never suited him. How provoking men are! They always want to *marry* every one directly. As if marriage were the only relationship worth having. Well, I can see my life a long way ahead now. I shall live here ten months out of the year and grind away at my writing; the other two months I shall spend in a Swiss hotel. I shall get a little older every year, and, as that minx Flora says, a little uglier. Flora will marry, and then there will be no one who cares a rap for me. Some day Jack will come back with a liver and a family. (*The bell rings.*) Jack come back already! Oh!

[*She rushes to the door and opens it. A SEEDY-LOOKING SPECTACLED FOREIGNER, in a dilapidated coat, makes his way in before she has*

recovered from her surprise. He bows obsequiously and presents a visiting-card on which she sees a German name, and, scrawled in pencil, the names of a distinguished English professor and of her own last book. She leads the way back to the sitting-room, but reflects that she is alone on the flat, and leaves both doors ajar.

STELLA. Please sit down. (*To herself.*) He'll dislocate his neck if he goes on bowing. Who can he be? Too shabby for a German professor. He can't be a thief — with spectacles and a bundle of papers under his arm. (*Aloud.*) You come from Berlin, you say, and you know Professor Camberwell, and you wish to see me about my book, "The Life of Dorothea Eutin." Do you want to translate it?

SEEDY-LOOKING F. Oh! madam — your very learned book — and I have corresponded with Professor Camberwell — and my father he has corresponded with Dorothea Eutin — yes, madam. (*Sighs deeply, gets up and bows, sits down again.*)

STELLA (*to herself*). I wish he'd speak out. I believe he has come to beg; but I can't offer a man money till he asks for it. (*Aloud.*) Are you engaged in literary work?

SEEDY-LOOKING F. Oh, madam — yes — a reader — a reader of the drama and poetry — and I have had a railway accident, and was seven months in the hospital — seven months, madam — and it has affected

my head and my memory. But your book, madam, "Dorothea Eutin" — yes. (*Sighs.*)

STELLA. I'm sure I'm very sorry for you. I suppose you want to find work, or perhaps a little help?

SEEDY-LOOKING F. Work, madam? That is not to be found. I go to the editors and publishers. They are out — always out. I go to your great poet — I have written poetry myself — he has a visitor — always a visitor. I go to the German Consul: he gives me five shillings — five shillings, madam, to a man who has served his country — who has himself to support and two sons!

STELLA. It's not much, certainly. (*To herself.*) I wish Mary would come back. He's mad, I'm sure, and he's getting excited. (*Aloud.*) I suppose you earn your living in some way?

SEEDY-LOOKING F. Lessons, madam; sixpence an hour and never enough. I make five shillings a week. How can a man of letters, *a gentleman*, support himself and two sons on five shillings a week?

STELLA (*to herself*). I wonder if he is quite truthful. (*Looks at his card, which is still in her hands.*) Professor Camberwell! Why! — (*Aloud.*) Did you say Professor Camberwell gave you an introduction to me?

SEEDY-LOOKING F. Oh! madam. Professor Camberwell! I have corresponded with him — yes — and my accident — I cannot remember —

STELLA (*indignantly*). He died a year ago.

SEEDY-LOOKING F. Died! I had not heard it. What

a pity! Then I cannot go and see him. Ah! he said he would help me to return to Hamburg. The fare is two pounds ten, madam.

STELLA. I thought you said you came from Berlin!

SEEDY-LOOKING F. From Hamburg, madam. The fare is two pounds ten.

STELLA. I can't give you as much as that. If five shillings is of any use ——

SEEDY-LOOKING F. Five shillings, madam! — to a man who has served his country — to a colleague — a man of letters, who has lost his memory!

STELLA (*to herself*). I don't like it. He has a bad face. I wonder if I could floor him. He's a little man, but I've no more muscle than a mouse. I wish Jack would come back and turn him out. I've no money in my pocket. I must get some out of the writing-table drawer. I hate having to walk to the other end of the room. Suppose he came after me and knocked me down. But I should hear him move. Anyhow, I must do it to get rid of him.

[*She gets up and walks hurriedly to the writing-table. The moment her back is turned, her visitor rises softly and steals to a table covered with silver knick-knacks. He puts two or three in his pocket. STELLA sees this in a small mirror.*]

STELLA (*to herself*). A common thief. I knew it. What shall I do? Get past him and lock him in? The key is on this side of the door. Perhaps I had better

give him the five shillings and let him go quietly — if he will, the little wretch! What *is* he doing now — creeping to the fireplace? Oh, I wish I'd turned round before — he has picked up the poker — he means to knock me down and steal everything. What shall I do? How my knees tremble and my hands — idiot! — and there's nothing but a paper-knife. In future I'll *always* have a dagger or a pistol handy. He's coming — I'll frighten *him*.

. [*She turns so suddenly that she does frighten him for a moment. He starts back, she rushes forward, seizes his arm, and tries to wrench the poker from him. Just as she feels that the struggle is useless, she hears a step outside. The bell rings.*

STELLA (*loudly*). Jack! come here! Quick!

CAPTAIN D. (*strides forward*). Stella! What the devil! — Here, you little beggar —

[*He flings the man aside, but keeps a tight hold of him.*

STELLA. He has stolen my silver things and he was just going to murder me with that poker. Let him go, Jack! For Heaven's sake, let him go — out of my sight!

CAPTAIN D. I ought to give him in charge. However — here, where are the things you've stolen? Is that all, Stella? Then, get out!

STELLA (*when CAPTAIN DARESHAM returns*). Oh! Jack, did you hurt him?

CAPTAIN D. I hope so.

STELLA. I must buy a pistol *and* a dagger and keep them within reach.

[*A long silence.*]

STELLA. Why did you come back, Jack?

CAPTAIN D. Why did you let that blackguard in?

STELLA. I thought it was you. I flew to the door, and ——

CAPTAIN D. Oh! you thought it was me and you *flew* to the door! Then you wanted me to come back?

STELLA. I'm always glad to see you.

CAPTAIN D. (*gravely*). Look here, Stella. You mustn't play with me any longer; it's not good enough for either of us; either I go, altogether, or I stay, and we get married at once. Which is it to be?

STELLA (*smiling and putting her hand in his*). I don't know what you mean by "at once," Jack; but if you object to machine-stitching, as I do, your hand-sewn things take — You never let me finish a sentence!

[*MARY is heard letting herself in at the outside door, and speaking to some one else there. A moment later FLORA HATHAWAY walks in without announcement. She perceives that she should not have done so.*]

FLORA. I forgot my — Oh!

WALL-PAPERS

The drawing-room in an unfurnished house. There are two large books of sample wall-papers on the broad window-seat. In front of these is a plank on trestles. MR. JOHN ELIOT and MISS CYNTHIA CAPEL are sitting on the plank and looking at the wall-papers.

MR. E. That one isn't half bad. It would light up well and look cheerful.

CYNTHIA. Cheerful!

MR. E. Bless me, Cynthia! We *want* our house to be cheerful, I suppose!

CYNTHIA. What you call cheerful I call depressing.

MR. E. That's unfortunate, isn't it?

CYNTHIA. I could *not* live in a room that jumped at you.

MR. E. I shouldn't like it myself.

CYNTHIA. Now that design I showed you yesterday...

MR. E. Don't speak of it. Rows of roses as big as cabbages and the colour of blotting-paper. Have

it by all means, if that's what you like, but don't expect me to sit in the room.

CYNTHIA. I'm afraid there won't be a room in the house we can sit in together. Surely we shall find that inconvenient.

MR. E. What's the matter with the dining-room?

CYNTHIA. There would have been nothing the matter with it if you had left it to me. Aunt Sabrina recommended that beautiful carpet...

MR. E. I draw the line at a mustard-coloured carpet. You've got yellow curtains in there, and very odd they'll look. Red's the colour for a dining-room.

CYNTHIA. What an early Victorian idea!

MR. E. And, by the way, Cynthia, I went into Bunthorn's yesterday and saw the chairs you'd chosen, and I said I'd speak to you about them. They won't do, you know. And where's the sense of a board on trestles, instead of a properly made table? I'm not a mediæval baron.

CYNTHIA. No; but you can try to live like one.

MR. E. Perhaps you'd like your floor strewn with rushes and lighted by torches.

CYNTHIA. I should. Even a suburban drawing-room in the nineteenth century might look beautiful by torchlight.

MR. E. Well, we'd better get back to our papers. Dawkins will be here directly. He said five o'clock. How about this one? Poppies.

[CYNTHIA starts so hastily to her feet that her

skirt catches the corner of the plank and pulls it from the trestles. MR. ELIOT jumps up too. The plank falls on the floor with a good deal of noise.

MR. E. What is the matter with you this afternoon, Cynthia?

CYNTHIA. I might ask that of you, I think. Poppies!

[MR. ELIOT stares at her as if he really thinks she has taken leave of her senses.]

CYNTHIA. Have you quite forgotten that a year ago you were nearly...engaged...to a Poppy?

MR. E. (*firmly*). I had quite forgotten it at the moment. I generally do when I am with you, and it was never the near thing you make out.

CYNTHIA. But you want to surround me with flowers that will constantly recall her.

MR. E. They won't do anything of the sort. Besides, she's married.

CYNTHIA. What has that to do with it?

MR. E. Really, Cynthia, if you can't trust me not to philander after married women ——

CYNTHIA. (*teasingly*). Yes...if...what then?

MR. E. Oh! never mind. Come, choose this wall-paper.

CYNTHIA. Aunt Sabrina says a woman ought to die rather than marry a man who does not swear she is his first and only love. Could you swear that, Jack, to Aunt Sabrina?

MR. E. My dear Cynthia, at the present moment I feel more inclined to swear *at* Aunt Sabrina.

CYNTHIA. Oh! if you are going to call me "My dear Cynthia" in that voice...as if we had been married for years...(*To herself.*) And we have only been here half-an-hour...but it is very quiet and dull in this room...Aunt Sabrina is quite right...(*Aloud.*) Jack! I have made up my mind that I don't want to go to the Lakes.

MR. E. (*vexed*). But it's all settled. I've engaged our rooms at that little inn on Ullswater, and my fishing-tackle is ready, and it was you who proposed it and planned it...walking and boating and fishing all day...and in the evenings you're going to read Browning to me, and try to make me like him.

CYNTHIA. I'm afraid if we walk all day we shall be too sleepy for Browning.

MR. E. Then we'll sit in a boat all day. Anything to please you.

CYNTHIA. I think Paris would suit us better. I could go to the Louvre, and you'd have the boulevards and cafés and things. I'm afraid Ullswater will bore you.

MR. E. Oh! if you want to spend your honeymoon in a big shop...why not take rooms near Whiteley's?

CYNTHIA. !!! (*Pause.*) I meant the museum, not the shop.

MR. E. (*not as much abashed as he should be*). I

dare say the shop would have a look in, too. I suppose you're as fond of chiffons as most girls. I hope so.

CYNTHIA. I don't know why you should either suppose or hope that I am a mere empty-headed doll.

[Mr. E. *says something quite inarticulate.*

CYNTHIA (*sighing*). Aunt Sabrina is staying with us.

MR. E. I might have guessed it.

CYNTHIA. I don't know how. She came quite unexpectedly yesterday.

MR. E. I shall be glad when you have seen the last of her.

CYNTHIA. What can you mean, Jack? Do you propose to forbid my friends the house?

MR. E. Not your *friends*.

CYNTHIA. Aunt Sabrina is my dearest friend. She is so sympathetic. She is always *perfectly miserable* about other people.

MR. E. Who is she miserable about now?

CYNTHIA. Me.

MR. E. Rather unnecessary, isn't it?

CYNTHIA. I don't know.

MR. E. *You don't know!*...and our wedding is to-morrow week!

CYNTHIA. Aunt Sabrina says it is such a mistake to marry young. She says if we waited five or six years we might like some one quite different at the end of the time.

MR. E. Very likely...But we're not going to make the experiment.

CYNTHIA. We *should* know each other better if we waited. When Mr. Allpress proposed to Mabel, Aunt Sabrina told him to come again in two years.

MR. E. Yes, and you know what happened.

CYNTHIA. Mabel found out that Mr. Allpress did not really care for her. Aunt Sabrina says it was a most lucky escape.

MR. E. Does Mabel see it in that light?

CYNTHIA. No. She droops, poor dear. I'm afraid she doesn't quite understand or value her mother.

MR. E. (*laughs rather unkindly*). Allpress told me the whole story. He got sick of waiting, or of Aunt Sabrina's little ways, and married some one else. I don't blame him much.

CYNTHIA. If you mean that for a threat, Jack ——

MR. E. Why, dearest girl, I mean nothing....But I shan't keep my temper much longer.

CYNTHIA. I sometimes think Aunt Sabrina is right. It is a great mistake to marry at all, and to marry a man who can't even keep his temper might be most unpleasant. Aunt Sabrina says ——

MR. E. Damn Aunt Sabrina!

CYNTHIA. She says that if I broke off my engagement to you she would go back to Little Steeple happy. (*Plays with the ring on the third finger of her left hand.*)

MR. E. Very well, Cynthia. You must decide

whether you will make me happy or Aunt Sabrina. You evidently can't please us both.

CYNTHIA. And you are indifferent?

MR. E. (*stiffly*). You do what you can to make me so.

CYNTHIA (*takes off her ring*). You leave me no choice.

[*A loud knock at the front door.*]

MR. E. There's Dawkins. (*Rushes out.*)

CYNTHIA. Aunt Sabina is quite right. He doesn't care for me. If I did, he would see how much — how very much — I care for him. I'm sure I've done all I can this afternoon to show it.

[MR. ELIOT *comes back, accompanied by MR. DAWKINS, a thick set, middle-aged man, with a strong Cockney accent.*]

DAWKINS. I'd oughter order that droring-room pyper to-night if the 'ouse is to be ready by the sixteenth, and I did sy the sixteenth, and when I sy a thing I loike to do it. Of course, if the pyper isn't chosen...now that one would 'ang well, Miss. Good bold design I call it...no one would come away and sy they 'adn't *noticed* your pyper.

CYNTHIA *smiles faintly, but does not speak.*

DAWKINS (*taking a long envelope out of his pocket*). 'Ere's the agreement, sir. I've signed it.

MR. E. Oh, of course...the agreement. I suppose if I sign that, the house is mine for three years. (*Glances at CYNTHIA.*)

DAWKINS. Just as we arranged it, sir. You'll find it's all right. You can sign it now, if you like, and this young lady can witness it. Save you the trouble of posting it. I've got a fountain pen in my pocket.

MR. E. Oh! have you? I've often thought of getting one myself. (*Takes the paper and unfolds it, and pretends to read it.*)

DAWKINS (*handing him the pen*). 'Ere you are, sir. Just there, if you please; and the young lydy's nyme beneath yours. You see it's all right, sir. We've put in that there clause "in case of fire."

MR. E. Very well, Mr. Dawkins, I'll just glance through it. By the way, I'm afraid there's something wrong with the hot-water cistern on the top landing. I wish you'd have a look at it.

DAWKINS. There's nothing wrong with no cisterns in this 'ouse, sir. But I'll have a look. (*Goes.*)

MR. E. Well, Cynthia? Am I to sign it?

CYNTHIA. Are you obliged to, Jack?

MR. E. (*to himself*). Jack, indeed...and her usual voice. Then it's all right after all. (*Aloud.*) It comes to that. I've agreed to take it, and half the decorations are done. Well, you *know*.

CYNTHIA. You can't live in it by yourself.

MR. E. Certainly not.

CYNTHIA. What a pity you have no sisters!

MR. E. (*looks at her, takes a sudden resolution, and*

affixes his signature to the deed. Then he hands the pen to CYNTHIA). Write your name there, Cynthia.

CYNTHIA (*writing*). But now the house is yours, and you must live in it.

MR. E. Or sub-let it.

CYNTHIA. It isn't every one's house. It just suited us, but —

MR. E. Then come and live in it.

CYNTHIA. Oh, Jack! I *want to*.

MR. E. Have scarlet wall-papers and orange carpets...

CYNTHIA. I don't mind what we have if only I can be here — with you. I'm so glad you asked me — and we'll go to Ullswater and not to Paris.

MR. E. We might manage both.

CYNTHIA. I don't care about Paris; but Aunt Sabrina said that if we went to a quiet place you'd hate me in a week.

MR. E. My dear girl, I'll buy you what you please, and go where you please, and say what you please. But —

CYNTHIA (*meekly*). Yes, Jack.

MR. E. Don't quote Aunt Sabrina. She nearly parted us this afternoon. Sh! take care — here's this old god out of the machine who joined us together again. If it hadn't been for his agreement — Well, Mr. Dawkins?

DAWKINS (*scornfully*). What did you think was

the matter with that there 'ot-water cistern, sir? I've examined it most careful ——

MR. E. Oh — well — there's no *hot water* in it, you know ——

DAWKINS (*after a prolonged sniff*). If you've signed that agreement, sir, I'll write to the water company, and they'll turn the water on, and then there'll *be* some water in it. It won't be 'ot then, sir, not till you light the kitchen fire.

MR. E. I suppose not.

DAWKINS (*confidentially to CYNTHIA*). Thought the gentleman might expect it. He'll know a little *more* about cisterns soon, when 'e's lived in this 'ouse a bit. (*Going towards the book of wall-papers.*) Now this 'ere pyper, if I might recommend it — very tysty I call those magenta dysies...

MRS. SPETTIGUE

WHEN Mr. Spettigue, the Vicar of Potley, went to Switzerland for his summer holiday, Mrs. Spettigue of course went with him. She knew that the parish would go to pieces in her absence, but she also knew that when she came back she could soon put it together again. Anyhow, it is a wife's duty to remain at her husband's side, even when an unpatriotic doctor has ordered him out of the British Isles for the time. Mrs. Spettigue did not believe for a moment that any "foreign" air was equal to the air of Potley. But, though it flutters its own flag, Switzerland is invaded and occupied by the English every summer, and you may spend August in one of the right hotels without meeting as many foreigners as you would find most days in a hotel near Charing Cross. The Spettigues were recommended to one at Grüneegg by a friend who had taken the Sunday services there the year before. He said he had greatly enjoyed his stay and had hardly once realised that he was abroad at all. He also mentioned that the Bishop of Rye spent a fortnight at Grüneegg every August, and that he put up at the Hôtel d'Angleterre.

On hearing this Mrs. Spettigue went to the best shop in Ashfield, the nearest big town, and bought a handsome bonnet made of black sequins and trimmed with upstanding feathers. She had not been to Ashfield for a long while, because two years ago there had been a very serious and disgraceful bank crash there, and Mr. Spettigue had lost a hundred pounds by it. He had no children and was well off, so he did not feel the loss much; but Mrs. Spettigue took it very hard, and said that a town in which such people as the Eliots could prosper was not the town for the wife of the Vicar of Potley; and she consistently carried her custom to Elmford as long as it was convenient to do so. But the Ashfield milliners were superior to the Elmford milliners, and when it came to a bonnet that might make an impression on the Bishop of Rye, Mrs. Spettigue said Christians must not be vindictive, and took a train to Ashfield the same afternoon. For if the Bishop liked the bonnet and Mr. Spettigue he might be persuaded to offer Mr. Spettigue the adjacent living of Nuthall which had just fallen vacant. The drawing-room at Nuthall was twice the size of the drawing-room at Potley, and the drive had a self-respecting sweep, and the squire, who lived close by, had married the second cousin of a duke, a lady devoted, like Mrs. Spettigue herself, to good works and the improvement of other people. Mrs. Spettigue thought that life at Nuthall would suit her exactly. Before she started for Swit-

zerland she paid a farewell call at the rectory, and had a good look at the shape of the drawing-room.

"A new carpet would be necessary," she murmured to her husband as they drove away. "In fact, we should probably spend about a hundred pounds on settling in—just what those wicked, thievish Eliots stole from us. Some one told me the other day that the son was out of prison. The spirit of leniency that prevails nowadays is a direct encouragement to sin."

The journey to Switzerland was, of course, unpleasant. Mrs. Spettigue had never been out of England before, and many little things annoyed and surprised her. She said she would make the conduct of the frontier officials with regard to her dressing-bag the subject of an international inquiry; and she was really rude to two German officers who travelled in her compartment and began to smoke in her presence. As they were in uniform she took them for privates, and ordered her husband to turn them out of the carriage; but it happened that they spoke English and were gentlemen, and they threw away their cigars and explained to the poor little mouse of a parson that they did so to please his wife, and that they had a right to be where they were and smoke if they pleased. They did not meet with much gratitude from Mrs. Spettigue. She detested soldiers.

In Grünegg the vicar's wife soon felt at home. There was a pleasant society at the Hôtel d'Angleterre,

and Mrs. Spettigue found that a determined woman might govern it as easily as she governed her husband's parish. She led the conversation, and organised expeditions, and checked the advances of foreigners, and took care that people were treated according to their deserts. At Potley accidental advantages, like brains or wit or beauty, did not count, and Mrs. Spettigue made more of Sir Lucas Bunn, the notorious and successful company promoter, who had lately bought Ashfield Towers and furnished it from kitchen to garret, than she did of Mr. Aspland, a mere well-known war correspondent. In London Mr. Aspland was welcome in houses that refused to receive Sir Lucas Bunn; but London is not Potley, and its hallmark was always carefully ignored by Mrs. Spettigue. "He may be the best war correspondent in Europe," she said to Sir Lucas, "but I am told that his uncle has a chemist's shop. In Potley we judge people by their station in life. Any other test I consider irreligious."

Of course Mrs. Spettigue had found out when the Bishop was expected, and which rooms he and his chaplain would occupy, and where his meals would be served; and as the time of his visit drew near she became rather restless, and with regard to the guests at her table more inclined than ever to winnow the chaff from the grain. In the dining-room she always sat at the head of the long centre table, and the English guests she countenanced gathered near

her on either side. There were other tables, and other people eating at them, if you allow that foreigners are people. Mrs. Spettigue honestly doubted it. She had been told that the Bishop and his chaplain always dined by themselves in a private sitting-room, but she hoped for a more sociable arrangement this year.

"I shall point out to his lordship that a shepherd should mix with his sheep," she said, never doubting that her platitudes would please and instruct the Bishop.

Her own place in the picture was, of course, at his lordship's elbow, advising and informing him which sheep were white and which black, and which an uncertain drab. By this time she knew the staying guests in the hotel as well as she knew the cottagers of Potley, and she had even learned to gauge new arrivals quickly, and decide whether or not they were eligible for "her table." One evening an English honeymoon couple arrived on the mountain top, tired with their walk, well-dressed, pleasant to behold. The man held himself like a soldier, and was strongly built and tall. His wife had those most charming eyes that shut a little when they laugh, and laugh often. Mrs. Spettigue was in the hall when they arrived, but as they had no luggage with them she did not find out their name that evening. She hunted up the head waiter, and told him to put the newcomers at her table; and at supper, though they sat some way off, she addressed them several times, and asked

them if they would help with a concert she wished to organise in order to pay for the publication in Dutch and English of two tracts against strong drink and tobacco, written by her husband, for equal distribution in South Africa amongst our godless and profligate soldiery and our fellow-Christians the Boers. Mrs. Spettigue never tried to find out whether the people she harangued were likely to agree with her; indeed, she had never asked herself whether there was any one in the world worth considering who did not.

But next day the young people found their places set at a side table opposite a German professor and his wife. They made no objection at the time, for their new neighbours were more amiable and entertaining and better bred than Mrs. Spettigue. But afterwards it occurred to them that they were the only English people in the hotel who sat beside foreigners, and by the time they had been in the hotel a week they were both alive to the unpleasant fact that their country folk made every effort to avoid them. As they were on their wedding journey and were in love with each other they were, of course, not anxious for society; but even honey-mooners do not wish to be shunned as if they were infectious or criminal.

"Sir Lucas Bunn turned his back on me to-day," said the husband; "at home I should turn my back on Sir Lucas Bunn."

"I was sorry I did not come with you this morning,"

said his wife. "I went into the woods at the back of the hotel and sat down on a bench near Mrs. Spettigue and Miss Nixey. Directly I did so Mrs. Spettigue tossed her head and said, 'We didn't bargain for this,' and they got up and walked away. Then I met Poppy Beyer, and asked her to play croquet, but she refused — rather uncivilly I thought — and five minutes later I saw her playing with that pasty-faced schoolmaster and his wife. It really isn't fancy as you said at first, Jack. They stare at us, and they whisper about us, and they leave us out. There must be some mistake, and we ought to set it right. Of course it is absurd and unimportant, but at the moment it is disagreeable. Here comes poor little Mr. Spettigue, and there is Mr. Nixey just behind him. Can't you get hold of one or the other?"

"I don't see how I can," said Jack doubtfully.

Nevertheless, as Mr. Spettigue toddled their way, Jack got up, and his wife watched the two men approach each other. She saw the wizened vicar glance one way and another, and suddenly swerve, and then trot forward again to a distant corner of the terrace where his wife sat with some of her friends. Jack strolled slowly on, and soon met Mr. Nixey, a good-humoured self-important person, the mayor of a small manufacturing town. He looked uncomfortable, but he plodded on past Jack, and took no notice at all of the young man's salutation. So Jack returned to his wife, and the words he used may be easily imagined.

"Mrs. Spettigue is excited about something," said Jack's wife. "She is scolding her husband, and pointing at us. Shall we leave to-night, Jack? It is really unpleasant here. Shall we come upstairs now?"

"No," said Jack, "I've just ordered coffee, and we'll have it here, and we'll keep to our plans, and these people shall mend their manners or I'll know the reason why."

"Mrs. Spettigue is getting up," said his wife; and she rose herself and looked alarmed. "She is coming across the terrace — to us — oh, Jack!"

"Sit still, Mary," ordered her husband, half laughing, half angry.

So Mary sat down again, and the young couple waited while Mrs. Spettigue marched solemnly across the broad gravel terrace. When she reached their table she seated herself between them, but they looked at the scenery and not at her, and they did not speak. Their apparent *sang-froid* annoyed her, and her manner became more aggressive.

"I think your name is Eliot," she said to Jack.

"It is," said he.

"You come from Ashfield in ——shire?"

"I do."

"My husband is the Vicar of Potley. We do not visit with Ashfield people, but we hear a good deal about them."

"Indeed!"

"Need I say more?" asked Mrs. Spettigue.

"Just as you like," said Jack; and then the coffee arrived and made a diversion.

"It is the sudden arrival of the Bishop that renders the position so unpleasant," said Mrs. Spettigue when the hotel servant had departed.

"Has the Bishop arrived?" asked Mrs. Eliot, looking up for the first time.

"He is walking up the hill," said Mrs. Spettigue. "The vicar met him and hurried back to tell me. He has come a week earlier than we expected. I hoped that you might go, and that I might not be forced to perform this distressing duty. But as Potley is so near Ashfield, and as I know all about you and feel responsible to the Bishop—surely you see—the fact is, you ought never to have come to this hotel. I have felt compelled to warn people, and they have been grateful."

"The Bishop—" began Mrs. Eliot, but her husband checked her with a glance and spoke himself.

"You seem to be a silly, officious woman," he said to Mrs. Spettigue; and she floundered to her feet, red in the face, and spluttering with wrath.

"Can you deny that you come straight from prison?" she exclaimed, "any one can see it by your hair." And she turned her back abruptly on the husband and wife, gathered up the little vicar, and hurried on to meet the Bishop who, she reckoned, must now be near the top of the hill.

Five minutes after she had been presented to him

she was in the midst of her story. The Bishop heard of the infamous bank smash, and of the vicar's loss, and of the trial and the conviction, and of Mrs. Spettigue's horror when the felon and his wife arrived at the hotel, and of Mrs. Spettigue's efforts to get rid of them.

"But are you quite sure," said the Bishop. "Eliot is a common name, and I myself ——"

"Quite sure," interrupted Mrs. Spettigue, treating the Bishop as she treated her husband, with firmness and a spice of contempt, "the man owns to it."

"Then there is nothing more to be said," observed the Bishop.

"If they have any shame left they will take themselves off," said Mrs. Spettigue, and when she got back to the terrace she looked anxiously ahead.

"The impudence," she gasped, "they are still sitting there," and with the point of her parasol she denounced the pair. The Bishop stopped short.

"Do you say that young man told you he was a released convict?" he asked; and Mrs. Spettigue did not like his tone at all.

"James Eliot, the son of the fraudulent bankrupt, his father's accomplice," she murmured.

"Nonsense," said the Bishop; "that young man is John Eliot, and he is a captain in the ——shire Fusiliers, quartered for some time now in Ashfield, and three weeks ago he married my niece; and her brother is the new rector of Nuthall."

Mrs. Spettigue's knees gave way under these repeated shocks, and she clung for once in her life to her husband's arm.

"And I've told every one in the hotel," she whispered to herself.

Meanwhile the Bishop had gone forward, and had been greeted by his niece and her husband. After a time they all came up to the Spettigues.

"Let me introduce Captain Eliot and my niece, Mrs. Eliot," said the Bishop, and he spoke severely. But Mrs. Eliot's eyes were laughing, and she offered Mrs. Spettigue her hand. Captain Eliot twisted his moustache and looked away.

"You were quite right about Jack's hair," said Mrs. Eliot. "*Any one* would think to look at him that he wished to be taken for a convict."

Mrs. Spettigue made some kind of lame apology, but she insisted on leaving Grüneegg that evening. As Nuthall had gone, the favour of the Bishop of Rye was not at present important to her, and she was glad to return to Potley where no one would presume to call her a woman, and where her friends believe that the air of Switzerland did not suit her, and that society in Swiss hotels is disagreeably "mixed."

WITH THE HELP OF THE COTILLON

THE Greenfields always gave a dance on New Year's Eve, and whether it was the fashion or not they invariably danced the cotillon after supper. Mrs. Greenfield was a German, and knew exactly how to choose and provide for the elaborate figures. Indeed, there were few events for which Mrs. Greenfield could not provide. In her house her word was law. Mr. Greenfield, of course, did not dispute it, nor did the children, nor did even the servants. The only person who ever showed an inclination to rebel was her daughter Pamela.

This young lady had grown up the image of her mother. She had the same grey eyes, firm mouth, and strong, light figure. Among her companions she was a leading spirit. At home she showed herself ready to organise little rebellions and lead the way to victory. When she came home from school, Mrs. Greenfield settled in her own mind that Pamela must marry at once. No sooner had she arrived at this conclusion than she fixed on the right man, and even on the occasion when he should declare himself. Mr. James

Haverstock had been dangling after Pamela ever since her first ball, eight months ago. He should dangle no longer. With the help of the cotillon he could easily be brought to the point on New Year's Eve.

Mrs. Greenfield was not the woman to urge on a reluctant suitor. Her daughter possessed both money and good looks. Mr. Haverstock had paid his court to Pamela with much persistence, and would, doubtless, have declared himself long ago if he had received the encouragement he deserved. But with vexatious folly Pamela fluttered from him, spoke of him mockingly, said he was bald, stout, and stupid. As if a stupid man could make his income! and as if slim young men were not a step farther every morning towards the time when they, too, would be bald and stout! Of course, there was some one with whom Pamela compared James Haverstock—to his disadvantage. When she spoke of young men in the abstract her mother knew that she saw their engaging qualities in a concrete specimen whose name was Charles Ludlow, and who had nothing but his good looks to recommend him. He had painted one successful picture, and the art critics sometimes tore him to pieces and sometimes patted him on the back. One picture is not much to marry on. Pamela said that his studio was crowded with masterpieces, all of which would sell for immense sums when they were finished; and that his friend on the *Mayfair Gossip* had promised to cut him up so savagely that the town would

crowd in thousands round the fragments. Mrs. Greenfield sniffed. She had been born forty years ago in a small German mercantile town, where artists, actors, and pen-men were reckoned all together as unstable and rather vagabond. Her old prejudices were as vigorous as her constitution; and Pamela understood quite clearly that her mother favoured Mr. Haverstock.

The thirty-first of December arrived, and all the young folks known to the Greenfields came to dance the Old Year out and the New Year in. They danced and they danced. Then they had supper and drank champagne and punch, and wished each other a Happy New Year. They opened windows so that they might hear the city bells, and some of them stepped out on the verandah. Pamela, followed by Charles Ludlow, went farther still. They reached the garden, which was moonlit and hard-frozen. They walked right round it very slowly, and then Pamela said she must go back and lead the cotillon.

The guests reassembled in the drawing-room, the musicians resumed their posts, the servants carried in the properties. The most conspicuous of these were two sticks, each of which had long coloured ribbons floating from one end. There was also a hand-mirror, a sheet, a box of extra large crackers, a sofa-cushion stuck full of favours, and a tray piled with little bunches of hot-house flowers.

Pamela was to lead the cotillon with her young

German uncle, Fritz Elster. He knew how to give the necessary directions both to the guests and the musicians. There was quite a sprinkling of Germans present, and the majority of Mrs. Greenfield's English friends had been at the house on New Year's Eve before. So the dance was not likely to become as flat and spiritless as it sometimes does in England when people are not used to its topsy-turvy ways. Pamela had received her directions early in the day. She knew exactly what Mrs. Greenfield expected of her. She was to seize every opportunity of showing that she appreciated Mr. Haverstock. He would behave with his accustomed gallantry, and the sequel would probably be in accordance with Mrs. Greenfield's wishes. Pamela felt no doubt of it. She knew better than any one how anxious her elderly suitor was to screw his courage to the sticking-place. It had become more and more difficult lately to hold him off.

The cotillon began as usual with a polonaise. All the dancers marched in couples behind Pamela and Uncle Fritz, and, after certain complicated evolutions, sat down again. Then the leaders took up the be-ribboned sticks. Six young men were invited to seize Pamela's ribbons; six girls were called from the ranks by Uncle Fritz. The twin colours were to waltz together. Mrs. Greenfield, from her position near the door, looked anxiously at Pamela's half-dozen, and saw to her vexation that Charles Ludlow had been chosen, but not Mr. Haverstock. In the succeeding rounds of this

figure Pamela, as daughter of the house, was constantly asked to take a part. So, when Mr. Haverstock carried the ribbons first to her he only imitated a dozen other men. There was nothing remarkable in that little attention.

There were one or two figures after this in which Pamela neglected her chances. Then she sat down in the centre of the room with a small mirror in her hand, while Uncle Fritz brought one young man after another to stand behind her chair. If she did not like his reflection she wiped it away, and he retired. A little row of rejected aspirants were waiting aside already when Mr. Haverstock came forward. Mrs. Greenfield thought she noted a slight accession of interest on some faces as he bent over the back of Pamela's chair so that the girl could see his image in the glass. For the moment Mrs. Greenfield wished him less portly and plain. But she forgot the wish in her immediate indignation when she beheld her daughter's conduct. Pamela wiped him viciously out of the glass, and then got up to dance with Charles Ludlow; who strolled forward smilingly and put his arm round Pamela's waist as if it belonged there. Mrs. Greenfield heard one or two people call them a handsome couple, and she reflected that it is easy to put a high value on good looks with regard to a marriage in which you have no interest. She felt anxious and angry. She knew Mr. Haverstock to be a vain man, and she saw that he had turned very glum.

But the worst was still to come, and for this bad business Mrs. Greenfield never forgave her brother Fritz. How could he presume to introduce a figure that she had not sanctioned? one that she considered vulgar, and, at any rate, unsuitable in an English drawing-room. If only she could have stopped him! But, although she was tall enough to see everything that went on, she really stood behind a close little crowd. She could not push her way through or attract Fritz's attention without disturbing people and making more of a fuss than she liked.

Fritz had thrust a little basket into Pamela's hands, and told her in a loud voice that she must present it to one of the two gentlemen he would straightway bring to her. With the other she would dance. The Germans looked on and smiled. Some of the English people were evidently puzzled and, seeing this, that blundering, foolish Fritz must needs explain to them that the German idiom "to give a basket," means, in ordinary language, to dismiss a suitor. He then smiled amiably at his sister, readjusted his pince-nez, and summoned Mr. Haverstock and secondly Charles Ludlow. Mrs. Greenfield could hardly believe that he made his choice by accident.

The two men were certainly a great contrast to each other, and no one was much surprised when Pamela, with a self-possession little curtesy, offered the basket to Mr. Haverstock. But a good many

people would have felt rather sorry for him if he had not been unwise enough to show temper. He almost snarled at Pamela; he threw the basket back to Fritz instead of dancing round with it as by rights he should have done, and he strutted back to his place muttering that he had played the fool enough for one night. Perhaps he had. At any rate, it is not unnatural that a portly, middle-aged man should object to waltz with a basket for a partner. Mr. Haverstock left the house a little later in a furious temper, and with the lowest opinion of foreign pastimes.

There were several new figures after this, all of which gave Charles and Pamela their opportunities. By the time the last round came, every one in the room knew which coat would sport Pamela's favour, and which hand would accept Charles Ludlow's bunch of flowers. At the finish, when each couple had taken their turn in this popular figure, there was one favour left, and one bunch of flowers. The guests looked at Pamela. Pamela looked at Uncle Fritz. Then, as he signed to the musicians to strike up again, she tripped to the denuded sofa-cushion, possessed herself of the solitary favour, and pinned it on Charles Ludlow's coat. He presented her with the flowers. They whispered, nodded to each other smilingly, and danced down the room to Mrs. Greenfield. Other couples had arisen and were joining in the final waltz. Amid the hubbub the two young people could speak to the mistress of the house unheard.

"The cotillon has been a great success," said Charles Ludlow.

"I think it has been a great failure," said Mrs. Greenfield.

"I am engaged to be married, mamma," whispered Pamela.

"To the wrong man," said her mother.

"That's a matter of taste," replied the girl.

"You will consent?" murmured Charles Ludlow imploringly.

Mrs. Greenfield looked at them severely. "Mr. Haverstock has just told me that he means to take a trip around the world," she said. "He expects to stay away three years."

And it did not strike the young people she addressed that her reply was at all irrelevant. They gazed at each other with ecstatic eyes and joined in the dance again.

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